THE

Fast of St. Magdalen,

A ROMANCE.

BY

MISS ANNA MARIA PORTER.

——— "Thou shalt leave
Each thing beloved most dearly: 'tis the last shaft
Shot from the bow of exile." CAREY'S DANTE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE

FAST OF ST. MAGDALEN.

CHAPTER XXII.

As consciousness slowly returned to Ippolita, she found herself in the arms of some one bearing her down the staircase of the tower.

An indistinct impression of what had passed during the last twenty-four hours, made her endeavour to break from this person: but he spoke, and assuring her in the voice of Baron Wernheim, that she was still under the protection of friends, proceeded hastily on.

As he went, however, he told her in few words, that it was necessary she

should immediately quit the watch-tower, apprehensions being entertained of a stronger force coming to its attack, than the slight one his people had just repelled. Ere she had time to answer they entered the hall.

Morning was just breaking at that time, and its grey glimmer mixed with the quiverings of one or two expiring lamps, caused a confusion of light, which rendered every object doubtful. She saw, however, that the pavement was drenched with blood, and strewn with broken weapons: some of the Baron's soldiers were busied in removing three or four wounded men, whose groans were their only testimony of life. At the further end of this dismal chamber, and directly under its huge window, stood Renati, leaning on a pike, and looking fixedly at the extended body of a man evidently dead.

All of light which there was without, shone through the window upon this

lifeless body. The face, the proportions, were not to be mistaken: Ippolita shrieked, and buried her head in the mantle of the Baron.

The latter faltered in his footing a little, from her violent recoil; and as he paused to recover himself, assured her that her persecutor would molest her no more.

These words went like an ice-bolt to her heart: it was a strange sensation; compounded of awe at the account which Guidobaldo was gone to render up; of horror, that she was most likely the cause of his untimely end; of sorrowing recollection of his father's services; added to the sense of release from his terrifying passion.

These feelings locked up her voice, but gave language to the convulsive action with which she grasped the Baron's arm, as he was again moving towards the opposite door. Wernheim understood that grasp, and relaxed his hold: she slid from his arms, and drawing near the

corse of Guidobaldo, leaned over it, trembling and silent. Renati just raised his clouded eye as she advanced, and dropping it again, resumed the gloomy meditations she had interrupted.

Guidobaldo lay a thrilling image of death. There was still fearful beauty in his features; but such fierce remorselessness was expressed by the grim fixture of his teeth, and the black knitting of his brows, that even in death that countenance threatened and appalled.

Pale and shuddering, Ippolita gazed on him with an intensity which almost blinded her: her brain was overwrought by horrors. Gratitude for deliverance from his violence, was lost in the dreadful thought that she was the cause, though an innocent one, of all the blood she saw floating around; and an anguish intolerable, because one to which the relief of tears is denied, convulsed her whole frame.

"O, pitying Heaven," she exclaimed,

wringing her hands, "am I never to be spared such sights as these?"

The Baron considerately sought to withdraw her from feelings so painful: "We have no time to lose, Signora!" he whispered, "the culverin you hear is firing upon a vessel of which we know not the strength — if she be armed, of course she will not be driven off by so inadequate a repellant. You must be got out of the probable confusion." As he spoke, he tried to impel her forward: but evading his kindly grasp, she sunk upon the blood-stained ground, and there earnestly clasping her hands, uttered aloud an agonized prayer for the soul of Guidobaldo.

This consoling act dissolved her heart; and melting then into tears, she covered her face, and stretched out her hand to Wernheim. The Baron took it, and led her away. Renati smothered a deep-drawn breath as he strode after them.

When Ippolita withdrew her damp

cold hand from that of Wernheim, and looked round again, she saw Renati beside her, in act to mount a horse which was held by one of half a dozen armed troopers waiting at the gate of the tower. The sight of these men made her shrink. Wernheim quickly re-assured her, by saying they were his people commissioned to guard her on the road into Germany; —that he would only stay to collect a sufficient force for the immediate protection of his coast, and then join her on her way to Inspruck. He commended her to the especial care of Renati, whose integrity had been fully approved by the events of the last night; and she then understood that it was to that resolute champion, Guidobaldo owed his death wound.

Neither time nor inclination served for minute enquiries: Ippolita was eager to get from a scene of horror; and the Baron anxious to remove her from the possible mischance of warfare. They exchanged, therefore, hasty adieus: the

one was placed behind Renati, on horseback, and the other returned into the tower to provide against an expected attack, and to dispose of the enemies he had already mastered.

For some time Ippolita rode in stupified silence behind Renati; at length she abruptly asked whether her brother had been in the rash encounter of the night? Renati returned only a sullen monosyllable. His moody tone chilled her; she ventured no more, and a longer silence followed.

Renati himself was the first to break it: he drew one of his deep breaths, while he said with struggling feeling, — "I'd have given my left hand, that it had been any other than the Signor Guidobaldo who struck at the Baron! — but I was forced to do what I did! — I couldn't stand by, and see the man cut down, who had given me back my sword, not six hours before. — A plague of all pretty faces! if it hadn't been for

your's, Lady, my Lord Guidobaldo would have been alive this day; and now he's gone, and his brave father still in a French prison, the Medici have lost the only friends who never turned their backs on them, — so I shall never see old Florence more!"

There was such genuine pathos in Renati's rough voice, that it went direct to Ippolita's heart; and while she shuddered at the thought of Alviano's despair, when he should be told of his son's fate, and the fatal cause for which he perished, she made an effort over her own emotion, in the hope of reconciling the faithful follower of her unhappy race, to himself.

As she spoke, her forbearing and kindly sympathy drew from Renati something like a regular account of what had occurred on the preceding night; and at the same time encouraged him to utter all that was perplexing his mind. She learnt then, that Guidobaldo had landed in a boat from a larger vessel, two

hours after midnight, with only three followers, certainly unconscious that any one occupied the watch-tower, besides those he had left there. Renati, who was to have had a safe conduct to Trieste in the morning, (in order that he might embark for the Italian coast,) had thrown himself down to sleep in one of the passages; and the Baron was consulting with his officers in the hall.

The knocking, and voices of Guidobaldo's party, together with a cautious peep at them from one of the loop-holes, suggested to Wernheim a suspicion of who they were; and seeing their number small, he ordered the German boor that had officiated as servant under Alessandro, to admit them without hesitation.

When they entered the hall, Wernheim directly challenged them as his prisoners; naming the force in the tower, as a proof that resistance was madness, and offering them honourable treatment. Guidobaldo answered only by a fierce

demand of Ippolita, whom he styled his betrothed wife; and upon the Baron's indignant refusal, called on his companions to assist in obtaining her by force.

That call was the signal for strife and fury; ere the Germans in the tower could be roused from their beds, their master was engaged in deadly combat with an enemy. Renati rushed into the hall at the clash of arms, and seeing Wernheim under the uplifted battle-axe of Guidobaldo, who held him griped in one powerful hand, he snatched up a harquebuss which was luckily loaded, and discharged it straight at the ruffian's heart. Guidobaldo fell instantly; and his companions were overpowered.

Whether this rash expedition of their leader's were or were not imparted to any other than those immediately with him, Baron Wernheim believed it his duty to provide against the probability of a yet stronger descent; and proposing there-

fore to remain at his post, till he could draw more soldiers and ammunition from the adjacent province, he confided Ippolita to the tried gratitude and honour of Renati.

The latter accepted the charge: yet ill at ease with himself for having obeyed the hasty impulse of saving a generous enemy, at the expence of Guidobaldo Alviano's life; whose private views Renati thought himself not called upon to judge, but whose public services to the exiled Florentines, he imagined ought to have bound all of that party to his interests.

This feeling, expressed with blunt sincerity, Ippolita combated with every persuasion that reason and religion could suggest; blending her arguments with words descriptive of that respectful consideration of Renati's prejudices, which his excellent intentions were worthy to obtain.

The force with which she represented the noble conduct of Baron Wernheim to

them both, the strong point of view in which she placed the violence and injustice of Guidobaldo to herself, and the ardour with which she painted the brightening prospects of her family, and their ultimate gratitude to Renati for his steady protection of her, all these combined, in some measure allayed Renati's uneasiness; but while assenting in part to what she urged, he said gruffly, "I'll confess myself to the first honest priest we meet, and hear what he says to me. Though I'm a soldier, Lady, and as such, don't value life, I care for my soul, and have ever kept an eye on it."

Ippolita said a fervent word or two, in commendation of such laudable sentiments, then relapsing into silence, abandoned herself to painful and anxious thought for the remainder of that day's ride.

They halted at Razzaza that night, under the roof of an honest labourer, whose wife furnished Ippolita with a

coarse though clean bed, and homely supper.

Neither Ippolita nor this good woman could speak each other's language; but the one was pleased to earn a few Zechinos, and the other showed by her countenance that she was grateful and satisfied.

Grateful, indeed, Ippolita was, grateful to the best and most powerful of Beings, for her present comparative security: and though a solemn weight remained on her heart, in the idea of Guidobaldo being hurried out of life in consequence of his ungovernable passion for her, she struggled to throw it off; too just to herself, and the decrees of unerring wisdom, for any but involuntary emotions of regret and horror.

When she left her lonely chamber the next morning, her spirits were gladdened by the appearance of Baron Wernheim. Having completed his military arrangements, he had made the best of his way

to her during the night, more impatient than ever for the rendezvous with his Emperor.

Whether it were that Wernheim was associated in her mind with the dearer thought of Valombrosa, or whether the cousins really did resemble, is doubtful; but when Ippolita met his more than usually-animated salutation, her kindling glance shot the momentary thrill of love and joy. Wernheim, little skilled in any other heart than his own, and one besides, simply thought Ippolita very grateful, and speculated on nothing further.

After a brief interchange of personal inquiries, while their hostess was preparing breakfast, he proceeded to arrange their future plans. Ippolita then obtained from him a more detailed account of the circumstances attending Guidobaldo's attempt; and learnt, that Valentino was one of the wounded in the tower. Wernheim had visited him; and drew without difficulty from the giddy, worth-

less youth, a confirmation of his own conjectures. In practising upon the credulity of Ippolita, Valentino had merely given way to what he called a spirit of waggery, and had at the same time assured himself of a jewel which tempted his cupidity, when he saw it on her arm in the morning.

The transaction was abetted by his mother, who shared its mirthfulness, and whose self-love panted for some revenge upon Ippolita, for her evident distaste to her society. By her advice, having secured one prize, he set off to gain another reward from Guidobaldo. Report apprized him by the way that Vicenza had surrendered to the Germans, but that Guidobaldo had previously evacuated the untenable town, and fallen back with his army upon the Brentella.

Thither Valentino sought and found him. Enraged at Ippolita's scheme for imparting her situation to others, and alarmed lest she should effect her escape

by some happier stratagem than her last, Guidobaldo lost all consideration of duty, and merely masking his private views under that violated name, he hastened to Venice, to press fresh supplies, and to suggest indeed what might have proved a master stroke in the war, had he lived to execute it, but in reality determined, in spite of his word pledged to her brother, to cross the gulf, seize Ippolita, and force her to be his.

A few hours were first yielded to the senate; and then he hastened, not to take the needful rest they counselled, ere he returned to camp, but to embark for the Istrian coast, where part of his warlike scheme was to be executed, and where he professed to go thus suddenly and in so precarious a mode as that of a very small bark, solely to establish a prompt intelligence between him and one of his creatures, a servant of Baron Wernheim's.

The event of this mad enterprise is

known: but as it was likely to draw after it the fury of the Venetian republic, thus ingloriously deprived of its general; and as the bark that had borne Guidobaldo had crowded sail at the first discharge of the watch-tower guns, and was consequently gone to say that their companions were either killed or imprisoned; Wernheim deemed it right to send his prisoners further inland, and to leave a strong garrison in the fortress, ere he set off with the important news of young Alviano's death to his Sovereign at Inspruck.

In answer to Ippolita's trembling inquiry after her unkind brother, Wernheim could only tell her that Guidobaldo's companions said they believed he was at Rome with his mother's family: he then was happily far distant; and her more alarming persecutor was no longer an inhabitant of the same world with her he had oppressed! Fear of them was therefore over: but still her eagerness to hear of her best-beloved uncle was as vivid as

before; and beseeching Wernheim to think of some method for transmitting information to him, and of obtaining it for her, she for the first time ventured to ask if he could apprise his relations at *Il bel Deserto* that she was safe under her present protection.

Even to the cousin of Valombrosa she felt unauthorised to acknowledge the dangerous secret of having been sheltered by his roof: yet she languished to allay fears which too probably racked that generous heart for her sake; and she therefore veiled her deepest interest, by informing the Baron that one of her truest friends was a frequent visitor at the Palazzo Valombrosa, and that she wished that friend apprised of her safety, through the medium of the Marquis Valombrosa.

She blushed as she named Prince Angelo Rossano; blushed at her own needful artifice. Wernheim, however, gave her sudden colour another meaning,

and offered to send a letter from her direct to the person she named, by the aid of those travelling friars, whose habit gives them free passage through hostile principalities.

He excused his own intermitted correspondence with his Florentine relations, partly from his habitual neglect of such intercourse; and partly from the trouble attending it in time of war: and he regretted that the late rupture between the Pope and his Sovereign would render it impossible for him to forward the desired intelligence to her uncles, but through the same channel by which he must reach Florence.

Ippolita's own future destination was then more leisurely discussed.—Every motive of regard for Valombrosa's peace and honour, and for her own tranquillity, induced her to decide on accepting the asylum Wernheim offered, in the convent of which his aunt was superior. Her residence there would entirely remove her

from the resentment of her brother, should she prove successful in her application to the Emperor; or should she fail, would relieve her uncle's mind from his heavy care of her during the expected storms of the commencing campaign. It would place her beyond the temptation of entering again the domestic circle of Valombrosa, a temptation she ought to resist for his sake; and it would discipline her enfeebled spirit into something of its former strength.

Ippolita felt that her character had indeed lost its poise; but whether this change was solely the effect of those rapid and agitating events which had been hurrying her on for the last twelve months; or whether it were that one powerful affection was undermining her firmest qualities, and leaving her no inward support,—she knew not: but it was a question she meant to resolve; and with Heaven's blessing hoped to build herself up afresh in courage and patience.

Though secluded in the retirement to which she looked, were circumstances to arise which might restore her family, Valombrosa assured of her attachment, would then know where to seek and claim her with safety to his own honour: and if adverse events finished the ruin of her unhappy race, she need but bend her head at once, and for ever, under the irrevocable veil!

With a deep sigh at the last possibility, Ippolita uttered as much of this resolution as was proper for Baron Wernheim to know; at the same time enforcing the necessity of a speedy communication with her uncle Giuliano, who preserved the only document now remaining of her legal right to inherit her father's legacy; and whose presence at Inspruck would be therefore not only a comfort to her, but a sanction and an assistance.

Wernheim agreed that no time was to be lost: he speedily provided her with materials for writing the brief accounts

she wished given to both her uncles and to Prince Angelo Rossano; and having added to, and made up the packets, he dispatched them by one of his people to the Prior of Tersato, with whom he was in habits of mutual obligation, urging him to forward them by some expeditious and careful brothers.

This done, Wernheim speeded his remaining attendants; and assuring Ippolita that her present fatiguing mode of travelling should be exchanged for one more commodious, so soon as they could obtain such, he placed her on a horse, which she now begged to manage herself, and allowing Renati the distinction of being close to them, rode sedately by her side.

The casualties and opportunities of a long journey, with no other equal companion, made Ippolita well acquainted with Baron Wernheim.

Though he maintained the most scrupulous ceremony towards her, and

though she from womanly delicacy avoided much private discourse with him, when they halted for rest or refreshment, she gathered, insensibly, materials for forming a just estimate of his character: and she heard many anecdotes of his mother's family, which were interesting to her, from the circumstance of the Baroness Wernheim's relations being those of Valombrosa and Rosalia.

During this journey, Ippolita was led also to ruminate oftener on Valombrosa than she usually permitted herself, from the many occasions on which Wernheim appeared different from what *he* would have been, in similar circumstances: and though her observations did not lower the Baron in her eyes as an object of esteem, it showed her that no man could have awakened her to love, whose taste and judgment had not guided, and whose sensibilities had not harmonised with her's, like those of Valombrosa.

Wernheim was habitually taciturn,

consequently averse to enter upon any subject likely to draw him further than suited his humour: he did not therefore make any remarks upon the scenes he passed through, or the persons he mixed with, unless they concerned whatever business or interest greatly occupied him. Mere matters of taste never obtained more from him than a momentary glance of admiration, if they fell under his notice; but to comment on them, either absent or present, was out of the question.

Valombrosa, on the contrary, loved to *think aloud*, in the society even of persons for whom he had but common regard: his heart could not contain its feelings, nor his imagination refrain from embodying its vivid pictures, whenever the works of nature or of art excited either. And so inclined was he to every social impulse, that there was not one amiable face he met, which he did not recal afterwards with pleased recollection; nor any passing kindliness he received, which he

did not repay with some cordial courtesy at the time.

That amiable peculiarity, Ippolita had often remarked in him at *Il bel Deserto*; and she missed its delightful influence now.

On the present occasion, Baron Wernheim talked principally of the war, its probable effect on the fortunes of his fair companion — the means she must use, if necessary, to conciliate the Emperor — the characters of the ministers who must be conciliated also — and the illustrious actions of his own ancestors.

It was then, when he repeated some noble exploit of a forefather, or quoted some magnanimous action of a contemporary, that Wernheim resembled his nobler kinsman. At those times the roused soul shone through his glistening eye; and there was a thrilling something in his voice which claimed kindred with that of Valombrosa.

At such moments it was delightful to

Ippolita to look at, and listen to him, though but for the moment that likeness flashed and vanished. It is sweet, indeed, to dwell on any thing that makes what we love, seem present to us!

As the travellers advanced on their journey, spring advanced with them; spreading before them "her purest of crystals, and brightest of green." Ippolita's freed spirit began once more to rejoice with the rejoicing world.

The country through which she passed, increased in beauty and sublimity at every step: the pastoral valleys and embattled mountains of Tyrol alternately rose and receded before her. Everywhere she saw either the tender green of springing corn, or the livelier verdure of larch woods, yet greener and tenderer than that.

In the romantic defiles and deep basins of the Brenner-chain, she often heard the dashing of innumerable waterfalls, mixed with the far-off song of the

Tyrolese hunter, or the bark of sheep dogs following their master along some sunny brow, where he sought his new-fallen lambs.

Perhaps a wreath of smoke thinly ascending from a tufted hollow, marked the site of the shepherd's temporary home, and conducted the travellers to a rude hut formed but of four mountain slabs of slate or stone.

Now and then a shallow rill rippling over the heads of water-lillies, and round the tall stems of the Iris, wooed them to stop and taste its perfumed water.

The dissolving snows formed numberless rills of this sort, which as they flowed down mountain paths blue with the aconite, or red with the fringed pink peculiar to alpine regions, assumed their various colours.

The thick cooing of the stock-dove came from the depths of all the woods, mixing its plaintive sound with the mur-

mur of fanning leaves and the bleat of distant flocks.

Here and there a pretty hamlet hung on the side of a hill, among orchards in blossom, or flax-fields in flower; awakening the heart to thoughts of tenderness, and the mind to various speculations.—And upon these isolated spots Ippolita's eye loved to linger: for to her world-wearied, yet still tender soul, they seemed circles large enough to contain every unambitious virtue, every rational enjoyment.

Such a home—even such a home with Valombrosa, she thought—and a stealing tear blotted out the selfish wish.

Valombrosa was born for nobler things: his destiny was not to be the inglorious one of sheltered happiness; he was formed to shape the fortunes of others; to influence many, to good or to evil. He was placed upon a height on which the fiercest storms would beat as surely as the hottest suns shine; but from that height

he must not voluntarily descend into the shaded vale of blessed seclusion. And as she said this to herself, Ippolita stifled a sigh, and divorced her mind for a while from the seducing subject.

The magnificent country through which she was proceeding, assisted her efforts. The stupendous peaks of the snow-mountains glittering above the clouds; the monastery which overhung some precipice, and the castle which protected some pass; the occasional vale spreading into plenty and populousness, with busy towns and rolling rivers; and lastly, the spires of Inspruck itself, dispersed those softer reveries, and fixed her thoughts but upon one object, the agitating object of her journey.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Upon entering Inspruck, the sight of the Imperial guard assured the travellers that Maximilian was already there. Ippolita's heart beat when Wernheim pointed them out.

So much depended on the result of this interview with the Emperor! — the restoration to something like comfort of so many indigent exiles, now withering away in want, perhaps accusing all Piero de Medici's children of having forgotten their services and sacrifices! — The joy, long unfelt, of evincing gratitude, and hearing her father's memory blest! — O, if such a consummation to her baffled efforts were yet to be her's, she would

not dare to weep over the blight of fonder wishes!

Baron Wernheim conducted his charge to a convent, where he challenged for her female protection, until he should have had an audience of the Emperor, and learned his pleasure respecting her.

The sisterhood received Ippolita with the usual testimonies of christian fellowship. Unmolested by their curiosity, and invited to join their religious offices, Ippolita enjoyed the relief of peaceful communion with her own heart, and the comfort of social worship with those of others.

So long banished from every rite of her church, during her imprisonment in Istria, the first time she knelt before the Cross in the church of the Carmelites, surrounded by a crowd of pure and pious virgins, all mixing their voices in prayer or praise, the tears of sacred emotion flowed over her cheeks. She felt as if re-admitted into the presence of her Redeemer: and

a blessed sense of pardon for all she had done or omitted in the past, and of acceptance of her pious resolutions in the present, glowed at her breast, and gave energy to her petitions for the future.

Except by a mere message of inquiry about her health every morning, she neither saw nor heard from Baron Wernheim during eight days: he had, indeed, told her at parting, that he would not disturb her by a visit, until he had something decisive to communicate; and he kept his word.

On the ninth morning he appeared: his grave countenance telling nothing of his errand; for Wernheim was one of those persons, who are only *surprised* into *audible* looks (if such a term be admissible). A very short preparation was always enough for him, to hide gladness or grief under the same serious aspect. He first informed Ippolita that he had spent the whole of every day and the greatest part of every night in the councils or presence

of the Emperor; that he was in consequence going back immediately into Istria, vested with the government of the Austrian part of that country; that the death of Guidobaldo Alviano was likely to prove mortal to Venice, from the inadequacy of her remaining generals; that in consequence, the Baron was able to press Ippolita's suit, both on the ground of justice, on the plea of her brother having been in secret league with this enemy to Austria, and on the fact of Guidobaldo having fallen by the hand of Ippolita's servant. He said that Maximilian had at once expressed himself ready to admit her claim so supported, even though its right might be doubtful, but had honestly avowed himself uncertain whether the present state of his treasury would enable him to answer it.

Wernheim's business then lay with the minister of finance; and so ably had he managed him, (though he made no mention of such zeal and dexterity to Ip-

polita,) that it was agreed to borrow part of the money from the rich Abbey of St. Ambrose, and substitute for the other certain portions of the Emperor's patrimonial land, of which Ippolita would draw the revenue till they were redeemed, and the debt fully acquitted.

"Your uncle, with his documents, is now all that is wanted; and even that is but a mere form. Signor Guidobaldo did you a real service at last you see, for you have to thank his rash tempting of fate, for the clearness with which certain persons now discern your rights."

"O no — rather let me owe it all to Baron Wernheim!" exclaimed Ippolita, shuddering at the image he presented, and how much indeed do I not owe to you? You might have asked every thing for yourself; but you ask only for me, and so renounce your right of soliciting favours in future! Generous Wernheim! —generous"—she stifled the comparison and the sigh that would have followed it.

"That Renati is the most extraordinary low-born man I ever met with!" said Wernheim, purposely shifting the conversation from his own praises. "The Emperor bade me offer him a commission in our service, the privilege of using an armorial bearing, an adoption in short into our country, and he refused every thing. He said, that if he accepted one of these distinctions, he should feel himself a traitor and a murderer. As it was, he had killed a partisan in the defence of a benefactor (so he was pleased to call me): he was sorry for the necessity; that he liked me, owed service and duty to you, but never would give up his country, his name, and his honour. The fellow is worth a score of courtiers who are content to live upon the refuse of their forefathers' fame. When I see such, I am amazed good blood should ever so degenerate!"

The Baron's weak point was supersti-

tious reverence of birth; and Ippolita could respect that, as a prejudice springing from a noble soil. She just observed that Renati deserved to be the founder of an illustrious race, since he had not the fortune to belong to one already; after which she returned to the subject of deeper interest, and learned that her respectful acknowledgments through Wernheim would be sufficient for Maximilian.

His imperial thoughts were indeed too much occupied at this time, with powers and principalities, armies and senates, to care for the sight of a timid woman: and aware of his Sovereign's fickle temper, (perhaps afraid of exposing Ippolita's beauty to too much admiration,) Wernheim adroitly seized upon his wish to avoid an interview with the daughter of Piero de Medici; observing that it might indeed lead her to sue for wider assistance to her exiled kindred; and that by

speedily cancelling the disputed debt, he would gracefully dismiss her from his court for ever.

Thus then, there waited but the formalities consequent on Giuliano de Medici's arrival, after which, the proper orders would be issued on the Abbey of St. Ambrose, and the proper securities given on the lands of the crown. Ippolita would then be invested with the sole power over this money, and her uncle Giuliano, would of course receive and execute her wishes with regard to the disposal of it.

Until his arrival, an event which Wernheim calculated must soon happen, Ippolita would do well to repair at once to the asylum he had prepared for her in the bishopric of Saltzburgh: if she decided on this, he would be enabled to deliver her himself into the care of his aunt, ere he returned to Istria.

Ippolita felt some little sinking of spirit, at the necessity for Wernheim's departure ere those formalities were gone

through, which could not be dispensed with: she calmed herself, however, by Wernheim's pledging himself for the present sincerity of the Emperor, and the strict integrity of a minister, whose word once given was never recalled.

Assured that Renati would remain in Tyrol till he had seen her under the protection of her own family, she cleared her thoughtful brow, and professed herself ready to commence this second journey.

It seemed necessary that the joy of suddenly attaining an object so long sought, so little hoped for, yet so conscientiously persisted in through all the sorrows and sufferings it brought on her, should be moderated by some apprehension. Ippolita literally fulfilled the Scripture command, "*to rejoice with trembling*;" for her heart trembled as she imagined the possibility of disappointment.

This feeling, however, she was careful not to express to her benevolently-pleased

companion; and commissioning him with her acknowledgment of the Emperor's justice and goodness, she promised to be in readiness for their journey by the time he returned from court.

Many expressions of good-will and regret were subsequently exchanged between her and the nuns, with whom she might have remained, but for the secret attraction of every place remotely connected with the images of Valombrosa and Rosalia; and as the aunt of Baron Wernheim was prioress of the convent in Saltzburgh, to that she wished to go.

Renati was the only person in the Baron's suite when he came at the hour appointed: and Ippolita, as she looked upon his plain garb and rude accoutrements while he walked to and fro, with the mule destined for her, before the gate of the convent, tried to guess whether he were not as proud of having

rejected honours, as most men are of gaining them.

But there was no evidence of such a feeling, in the step sedate and firm as usual, the half-surly look of deeply-entrenched thought, and the total unobservance of every passer by, with which Renati continued to pace up and down.

As she looked at him through the arched gateway to which she and Wernheim were advancing, she could not forbear wishing that such a spirit, true as the steel of his well-dinted cuirass, were devoted to the fortunes of her uncle Giuliano.

Her outstretched hand, accompanied by a smile of fullest meaning while he assisted her to mount, were only answered by a respectful motion of Renati's head: he nodded a second time when she gave him the salutation of the morning, but replied not; and leisurely bestriding his own beast, followed her and the Baron at a distance, which seemed intended to

cut him off from their occasional addresses to himself.

Ippolita saw that something was strongly working in Renati's mind; and forbearing all disturbance of his meditations, whatever might be their subject, she proceeded singly with the Baron.

The journey, though short, was fatiguing to a woman, and the little party were obliged to halt occasionally; so that it was evening ere they entered the barrier which divides the Tyrol from the bishopric of Saltzburgh.

This was a long dark pass, ascending between naked rocks. A narrow road lay on one hand, winding midway along the very edge of the precipice, and at a fearful height. The interval between the two chains of rock, formed the bed of the Salza; a rapid and deep river, now swoln by melting snows and torrents, and roaring with the din of a sea.

There was something appalling in the sight and sound of its boiling flood, black-

ened as it was by the shades of twilight, and washing close up to the perpendicular base of its flinty walls. Ippolita instinctively checked her mule, and gave the scene a troubled glance: Wernheim reassured her; praised the sure footing of the animal she rode; and repeating the instructions necessary on such occasions encouraged her to proceed. But Renati dismounted, gave his mule leave to find its own way, while he walked between her's and the unprotected precipice, till he saw her in a securer road.

As their path suddenly turning off from the rocks bordering the river, broadened, and decreased in danger, the Baron led his mule near that of Ippolita, and entered into conversation. He informed her that the order of Mercy had established their house near this dreary place, principally for the sake of rendering assistance to the way-faring men and country-people, who frequently met with grievous accidents when daring the pre-

cipices and waters of the pass, during winter; and that since their establishment there, they had enjoyed the satisfaction of saving many lives.

"That is the convent!" he said, pointing to a low grey building which covered much ground at the further end of a delicious valley into which they were now entering. The uniform colour and form of the house harmonizing with the sobriety of evening, the stillness of the birch woods among which it stood, and the absence of every living thing from its luxuriant meadows, would have made an almost painful impression of tranquillity upon the senses of Ippolita, had it not been for the sylvan music of innumerable cascades which poured from all the heights around into the valley. Their movement just gave the scene life enough; and she regarded it therefore with the feeling of one who reaches a haven after a voyage of storms.

Her mule, following the brisker example

of Wernheim's, now cantered over the smooth turf, and soon brought her to the entrance of Santa Barbara.

As the Baron pulled the bell, Renati rode close up to Ippolita. "Lady," he said, "may I crave a few words with you on the morrow? There's something on my mind I must have off before we part." The rough soldier brushed his hand across his eyes at the word "part." "If my Lord Baron will grant me leave, I'll find some cabin here to give me a night's shelter; and then when you and I, Lady, have had our talk, I'll go back to Inspruck, and wait the Signor Giuliano's coming."

Ippolita interchanged some sentences with Wernheim, who gave the permission Renati sought, as he had ordered his own people to be in waiting for him on the road to Carniola; and telling him where to find shelter for himself and the horses at a farm-house belonging to the Order, he led Ippolita into the convent.

She found the inside of the building light and cheerful. The cloisters surrounded a large green court, filled with balsamic herbs, grateful to the smell and pleasing to the eye. The parlour into which she was shown was delicately neat, and the prioress had a mild and sensible countenance, which promised benevolence and invited good-will.

Having expressed much pleasure at the sight of her nephew, the holy woman turned to regard Ippolita, and asked him some question about her: the question was in German, and a female name was included in it. The stately Baron coloured, and looked a little embarrassed; but immediately began what seemed an explanation of his situation with the person his aunt had evidently mistaken for the lady to whom his heart and vows were pledged.

Meanwhile Ippolita sat pensively expectant, her heart nearly oppressed with the weight of Heaven's goodness in thus

removing her as by miracle from a scene of desolation and fear, into the bosom of kindness and goodness.

When the Baron's part in the conversation was over, the prioress addressed a few sentences in indifferent Italian to Ippolita, the manner of which was full of amenity; and her amiable pressure of the hand gave additional assurance of friendly intention.

Some refreshment was then offered, and accepted by the Baron, who ate his slight supper in haste, renewed his assurance to Ippolita of ascertaining whether the different packets he had dispatched for her had reached their destinations; then took a kind farewell, and withdrew.

Ippolita saw him depart with sincere regret, and as she thought over all his worth, and the possible chance of war, tears started into her eyes. Her acquaintance with him had been short; but his exertions to serve her had been little less than miraculous. She would not allow that

his conduct deserved more praise than that of Valombrosa in nearly similar circumstances: yet in truth it did; because the former acted from pure benevolence only, his tenderer feelings being devoted to another; and the latter became too soon susceptible of a feeling for the lovely creature he protected, which allayed its disinterestedness.

Ippolita might, however, have allowed Wernheim his full share of esteem upon this occasion; sure that his nobler cousin would transcend him upon every other.

After accompanying the prioress to vespers, and having been presented to one or two of the nuns acquainted with Italian, Ippolita retired to her sleeping room, which she found a neat and airy chamber, looking into the garden of the convent.

Here she renewed her thanks to Providence; and commending all she loved to the same gracious care, yielded herself up to sleep and happy visions.

Ippolita had begged to see Renati alone the ensuing day; and when he came after matins, she found him by himself in the parlour. He entered at once upon the subject which perplexed him. "Lady," he said, steadily regarding her, "that you bore me no malice for my perseverance in a duty which was as disagreeable to me, after all, as it was to you, always made me think well of you: and after we fell into the hands of Baron Wernheim, you seemed anxious to let him know, that although I was but a common soldier, I valued my honour more than my life; therefore I was ready from that moment to have given a hundred lives for you, if you had wanted them."

Ippolita exclaimed, "Kind Renati!" And he resumed without noticing the exclamation.

"My grandfather, and my great-grandfather, belonged to your's, either as their vassals or their servants: my father

went with your's from Florence. One of his humblest followers, I grant; but a true-hearted one. He taught me to live and die under the banners of the Medici: so after that sorry battle of the Garigliano" ——

"Were you there, Renati?" interrupted Ippolita.

"I was left wounded on the field," he answered gloomily, "or else I should have gone where the noble Piero went." He paused unconsciously, and Ippolita turned away her showering eyes: with a suffocated voice, she bade him return to what he was first saying.

"After that battle," he continued, "and the sad fate of our poor master, I thought it but my duty to follow his son's standard. The Signor Lorenzo was scarcely a lad then; something like our honoured Lord to look at: and a man's heart naturally yearns to a fatherless stripling. So I buckled myself to his fortunes—and his humour!" Here Renati

looked sternly repulsive of any severer comment from Ippolita upon the character of her brother, paused an instant, then took up his tale again.

"The young Signor distinguished me from most of my fellow-soldiers, as he grew up, and we fought in the same fields; and when he put me upon that service in Tuscany — you understand the thing I speak of — he first explained to me his reasons for wanting you out of the hands of the Marquis Valombrosa: and these were, that Signor's opposition to our cause in Florence, and the necessity there was for making you marry my Lord Guidobaldo. I have always thought, Lady, that women were born to obey — and craving your pardon I think so still — so I did not think I was doing a bad action when I consented to assist in getting you away, and taking charge of you afterwards. The night I first saw you, and helped to put you on horseback, my master hastily told me

that Guidobaldo had been forced to fight for you with the Marquis; that the latter was wounded, if not killed; and that I must lurk about the place a few days to learn whether he was or was not dead. On my saying that I hoped the Marquis had had a fair chance for his life, and came by his wound in honourable fight, my Lord Lorenzo swore by his sword it had been so; and with that oath I was content. I'd have taken his bare word for it — aye, liked it better! — Now, Lady, I have been told by Baron Wernheim that it was not so; that the Marquis was stolen upon treacherously; shot unawares like a wild beast from a bush or a lurking-hole; and that I, who never yet lifted my hand, even in the fair field, against a weaponless enemy, have been leagued with assassins, and duped by liars!"

Renati was so agitated when he pronounced the last violent words, that they nearly choaked him: he seemed either not to know or not to care for those rules

of society which would otherwise have tempered his epithets; and his sinewy hand actually quivered as he tried to tear open the stifling collar of his doublet.

"Lady!" he cried, stopping in his hasty walk across the chamber, and looking fixedly at her, "I know *you* will tell me the truth; and you must know what *is* the truth. — Answer me at once — Was it, or was it not so? — Do you believe my Lord Lorenzo countenanced this coward murder?"

Ippolita's gently-reproving eye lowered the unceremonious authoritativeness of his. "It is hard to answer your question," she said, greatly agitated: — "but I suppose it ought to be answered. The Marquis Valombrosa assuredly fell at my feet by the shot of a concealed assassin. That assassin was Guidobaldo Alviano — and — Lorenzo did not separate from him when he knew the fact."

Renati stood for awhile, on the spot where he had checked his perturbed walk, as if planted there. "Then *I*

know my course!" he said, and strode towards the door.

"Renati! you think not of revenge—of outrage to my brother—your master."

"My master no longer!" returned the stern soldier, frowning, "but your brother, and Piero de Medici's son—therefore protected. By the Holy Rood, though he had been the Emperor himself, I'd have challenged him on his very throne to answer the base affront of making an honest man the pander of villainy!"

Ippolita would fain have said something in excuse for Lorenzo, but she checked the natural impulse, convinced that it is wrong to palliate bad actions, be the offender who he may, and she cast down her eyes in sorrowful silence.

"Henceforth I am *your* soldier and servant, Lady," said Renati, after a long pause, his rough voice softening, "you shall command me where to go, and what to do."

"Then stay near me till my uncle Giuliano comes," returned Ippolita, her lifted eyes filling with tears of mixed emotion, and her tone expressive of grateful sensibility. "I should wish to retain such a friend and servant ever! But if my fate should be to abjure the world, I shall not then need your services, and must give you up to one that will employ them worthily. When my uncle comes, all that will be settled; stay till then, Renati. To know you near me, will be to feel that I have still a protector."

No additional motive was necessary to detain Renati. His honest heart gratified by this appeal, spoke in the flushing of his brow, and the moistening of his eye: he put his lips respectfully to the veil which hung over the hand Ippolita tendered, and that action sealed their compact.

The short remainder of their interview was then given to the discussion of circumstances connected with his stay.

Though there was something like forlornness in the conviction of being left among strangers in a foreign land, Ippolita was too sensible of the benefits she derived from such a situation, to permit herself more than a passing sigh of regret for dearer friends and more familiar scenes. She gave up her mind to the duty of gratitude in its fullest extent; willingly bending herself to the sometimes wearisome repetitions of the Prioress and the companionship of the nuns.

With the former, she studied German, to facilitate their mutual intercourse, and give her new means of usefulness; with the latter, she practised the duties of hospitality to strangers, and the less pleasing one of ministering to the sick or wounded.

Besides attending to the way-worn or wounded traveller, the nuns of Santa Barbara were enjoined attendance upon the sick in their immediate neighbourhood. Some, therefore, went forth to visit sufferers at their own houses; some

nursed them in the hospital of the convent; others prepared or distributed medicines and nourishing aliments. Others again prayed by the beds of the dying, or prompted the thanksgivings of the ignorant convalescent.

None were idle — none felt that their lives were wasted solely in barren ceremonies and selfish cares; but animated on the contrary by the consciousness of benefitting their fellow-creatures, while removed themselves from the temptations and dangers of this world, they journeyed on towards the next, cheerful and beloved.

Ippolita immersed herself at once in such blessed labours: and as she went with the sister whose office it was to gather simples, she not only acquired the useful knowledge of herbs and plants, but saw scenes of wild and sequestered beauty, which might otherwise have escaped her search.

Sharing with these pious sisters their daily cares and nightly watchings, her

heart was interested while her time was filled, so that no void was left for much speculation upon her own destiny.

But the tender affections of that heart, never slept: the idea of Valombrosa and Rosalia was always present to her. The very offices she now engaged in, recalled their active and far-stretching benevolence; and sometimes the thought stole across her mind with flattering sweetness, that she was rendering herself more worthy of their love, and of future re-union with them.

During her interview with Renati, who had become very serviceable to the nuns in their most hazardous acts of Christian charity, Ippolita talked more largely with him than she had formerly done, upon the subjects of vital interest to herself.

Respecting Renati's integrity as she did, and touched even by the humour with which he now and then testified his affection for her, surely it was not a weakness in her, to wish that such a sterling

character should learn to estimate that of Valombrosa? She frequently, therefore, introduced the name of that most beloved one, just saying enough to excite her auditor's desire of learning more: so that by degrees questions were respectfully asked, and explanations frankly given, till at length Renati's prejudice against Valombrosa changed into esteem, and admiration of principles, which, though applied to a loftier range of circumstances, were in fact of the same nature as those which had wedded him to the commands and fortunes of young Lorenzo.

On the subject of her uncle also, Ippolita was eloquent: there she could expatiate without reserve; without any of that strange agitation, which seized her at the slightest mention of *him*, whose eye, in former days, never turned on her, that it did not make all her pulses throb! it was gladdening to her to observe how Renati warmed, as she repeated all that uncle's beneficent views should he ever be

able to realise them, in Florence; many were the false impressions stamped by the sometimes ill-informed, sometimes passion-blinded Lorenzo, which she effaced from the true heart of this zealous partisan.

Thus occupied, thus soothed, Ippolita's days wore away in peaceful retirement, of which the only alloy, were temporary fits of apprehension, either about her uncle's safety, or the stability of the Emperor.

The arguments of the Prioress assisted, however, in dispersing them; and Renati, though frequently drooping himself in secret, withheld from her whatever information he gained with respect to the war, which was not of a nature to flatter her best hopes.

Although it was evident that the Pope was now inclined to the restoration of the Medici, for the sake of overthrowing the power of Soderini, and with it that of the French in Florence, his arms were unhappily unsuccessful at present; his new league with the Venetians did not

prosper: Guidobaldo's obscure fall had not only thrown confusion into all the plans which that young general left unfinished, but had cast a sort of contumely upon the cause. The Emperor's troops in Friuli and Istria, (where Baron Wernheim was already distinguishing himself,) were daily making conquests over those of Venice, while the French armies in Italy, led by Chaumont and Gaston de Foix, were carrying every thing before them, and threatening to overwhelm the states of the church itself.

So long as the French power was thus extending over Italy, so long must the hopes of the Medici wither: and whether the Pope were or were not anxious for their re-establishment, was a matter equally unimportant, unless he could find means of expelling the supporters of their enemies.

Aware of all this, Renati gave Ippolita no false representations; but he did not think it necessary to agitate her with

every doubtful report he listened to in an age when every detail of a distant event was doubtful, from the imperfection of their channels of communication; he contented himself with shorter visits and briefer communications, when the public rumours were not what he wished: and Ippolita having sometimes discovered through other persons, the news he shunned telling, soon learned to guess at the meaning of a certain moody tone of voice, and more inflexible look of his brows, during these shortened visits. She felt the honest fellow's kind intentions, and would not disappoint them.

Often, therefore, she veiled her panic-struck heart, by cheerfuller smiles than usual, and sent away Renati with a feeling of comfort which she had not herself.

Troubled as they were by anxious thoughts, the days and weeks passed, from their uniformity of occupation, with a rapidity which astonished her, since they were passing thus far from all she fondly

loved! but they who have endured great calamities, know how to make the most of every shadow of happiness: and the blessing of hope, to one who has only dared to *wish* during a cheerless period, is a blessing indeed.

Above six weeks were gone since she left the watch-tower, and though she had heard from Baron Wernheim by a dispatch he sent his Sovereign, that her packet to Giuliano de Medici was gone to him in the Bolognese, where it was thought he still lingered, she began to fear, that either it had never reached him, or that he found it impracticable to get in safety through the warring countries.

From her friends at *Il bel Deserto*, she guessed not how she was to hear; yet she pined to do so: and sometimes wished impossibilities that she might once more behold them.

She was walking one morning in the cloisters, stealing a few moments from self-appointed duties to such thoughts

as these, when she was told a stranger of distinguished mien waited her in the parlour.

Whose image flashed through Ippolita's mind! — She asked, in fluttered accents, as she hurried on, "if he were young?" The lay-sister answered, "not very young; she thought perhaps of middle age: — a man of a mild and engaging aspect."

"My uncle then!" exclaimed Ippolita, "my dear uncle!" and all bathed in joyful tears, she rushed into the parlour of the convent, and saw — Prince Angelo Rossano.

Those well-known features; — that so often-recollected smile half-pensive, half-cheering; that whole presence so associated with sweet and bitter remembrances, brought back so many hours of positive happiness, that Ippolita for one instant felt neither disappointment nor alarm: but both feelings quickly came; and as the flush of sudden joy vanished from her

face, exclaimed, "Prince Angelo! — How are my friends? — Know you where my uncle" —

"They are well; and your uncle is at Inspruck," he replied; the expression of his kindly eyes said every thing else that Ippolita yearned to hear. The vivid colour spread afresh over her face, while sinking down by his side, she grasped his hantl expressively, and the blissful tears which alarm had suspended, again flowed over her cheeks.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Much of what Prince Angelo told, and some things which he knew not to tell, must now be repeated.

On that night in which Ippolita was seized by Guidobaldo Alviano, Prince Rossano himself went in search of her and Valombrosa, expecting to find them sheltered in some cottage from the hasty storm.

As he took the direct road from *Il bel Deserto*, to the alabaster quarry, unconscious that Valombrosa had strayed from it, he might not have discovered his unhappy friend time enough to stay the mortal effusion of his blood, had it not been for the circumstance of Rosalia's dog having followed him into the woods.

The nice scent of the animal, tracked the change of Valombrosa's steps, and Rossano, importuned by his impatient whinings, turned aside, and followed whither he led. After proceeding a short way in advance, the creature ran under the archway where Ippolita had sheltered. Rossano looked in, and by the light of the servant's torch, who accompanied him with a mantle for the Signora, saw Valombrosa weltering in his blood upon the ground.

The shock almost unmanned Rossano: for an instant the idea of Rosalia, deprived him of the powers of motion and speech; but the same idea nerved him again; and so prompt were his orders, so judicious his precautions, that Signor Calvesi was summoned, and Valombrosa removed under his guidance from his present dismal bed, to his own chamber, long ere Rosalia knew that any thing extraordinary had occurred.

Calvesi's examination of Valombrosa's

wound gave little hope that it would not prove mortal that very night. The ball had perforated the lungs; and though the sufferer breathed and groaned, he seemed unconscious of every thing that was said or done around him.

The absence of Ippolita was another dreadful circumstance which it would require great caution to impart; but he trusted that the shock Rosalia must sustain when informed of that, would be weakened by the previous and heavier blow of her brother's fate. How melancholy was such a trust!

Rossano's own situation was painful beyond expression: he conjectured much of the truth, acquainted as he was with Ippolita's past history; and as it was impossible for a man of honour to imagine her brother associated in such an enterprise, his compassionate feelings painted her in an extremity of alarm from the violent passions of Guidobaldo Alviano,

which he durst not permit himself to dwell on.

To follow and seek her was however, impossible. The desperate case of Valombrosa, and the forlorn situation of Rosalia, bound him both in body and soul to them. He could only dispatch various persons in various ways on the same hopeless errand, a search after her — commission others to seek out Valombrosa's assassin — converse a few moments privately with the Countess Zucharo — and then at once prepare to see Rosalia alone.

Rossano had previously consulted with Signor Calvesi, and they had agreed that as it was probable Valombrosa would breathe his last ere morning, his sister ought to be made acquainted with his condition, at whatever risk to herself. This was a grievous necessity; but it was one; and as Rossano wound up his soul to the encounter of her grief, a grief which he feared would destroy her, he

learned by what that effort cost him, how dear she had become to him.

When he entered the room, whence Countess Zucharo had stolen out, Rosalia was sitting with her lute, resting her lily arms on it, but not awakening its music. Her unseeing yet lovely eyes were touchingly inclined, and the softened light from an alabaster lamp, threw something like moonshine over the congenial softness of her youthful face. She shook back her long fair hair with a smile of innocent delight at the well-known step of her friend, asking in a tone of playful reproach, "Why she was so deserted?"

Rossano had not voice immediately to answer: he contrasted her feelings and her appearance with the image of Valombrosa, whom he had just quitted, breathing what seemed his last, in the midst of sorrowing attendants; with the idea of Ippolita in the hands of ruffians, hurried he guessed not whither, nor for what fearful purpose; and it was with difficulty

he mastered the groan which shook his whole inward frame.

He regarded Rosalia as he would have done a victim adorned for sacrifice: her youth, her beauty, her innocent happiness, were *her* ornaments, and they wrung his heart.

He approached and sat down by her; no longer quite collected, or possessed of that self-command which could alone have made a mere friend competent to the office he had undertaken. He took Rosalia's hand, — it was the first time he had ever done so, and his trembled. She noticed its tremor with artless solicitude, and that finished the destruction of Rossano's composure.

But in some cases our strongest feelings are our best guides: Rossano neither purposed it, nor knew that he had done so, yet ere he broke upon the fluttered Rosalia with the whole of her calamity, he had filled her bosom with the sweet surprise of suspecting that she was the

dearest thing on earth to him; and that he was that being whom she once thought never would have existed for her.

Surely affection's instinct must have prompted this indirect avowal of Rossano! for it did indeed form a blessed counterpoise to the fearful agony of Rosalia when her brother's state, and Ippolita's disappearance, were reluctantly breathed to her.

Alas! even the delightful imagination of being dearest to Prince Angelo, was for a while inadequate to sustain her. As Rossano held her on his afflicted breast, (where she had fallen unconsciously,) he thought she would have died there; and his sorely tried heart, wrung as it had been with many, many sorrows, now felt the sight of her's, the severest of all.

Calvesi could only leave his Lord by snatches, for though other advice had been sent for, none was yet arrived, and he, therefore, was not able to do more

than order means for restoring Rosalia to her senses, and then leave the task of using them to others. This judicious physician's anxiety was to prevent the recurrence of those dreadful convulsions which had formerly shaken that frail constitution to destruction; and aware of what he feared, Prince Angelo would not entirely trust the charge of obeying his orders, even to the amiable Countess Zucharo.

During this time, Father Sordello passed between the chamber of Valombrosa, and that where his poor sister lay struggling against her weak frame with all the force which religion and regard for those around, could lend so tender a soul.

The pious consolations of this good priest, assisted the influence of Rossano, who still held Rosalia on his breast with that absorbing compassion which sanctifies actions otherwise proscribed. No longer capable of utterance, he spoke to

her only by the repeated pressure of his trembling arms; for to her, the expression of his fixed and pitying eyes was a blank.

But for the consciousness that those arms supported her, and but for the undisguised tenderness which poured, though she saw it not, from those eyes, and which she felt in the motion of his heaving heart, Rosalia must have yielded up life itself, in this trying hour. Her heart was torn between the images of her brother and her friend; and it was long ere she could lend any attention even to Father Sordello, when he asserted that the Signora Martello's way must soon be tracked; and judiciously proceeded not to press on her just then, the necessity of submission, but to remind her of the frequent instances of sore trial, and after reward, which are recorded in the Sacred Volume. He led her, therefore, to hope, when human views would have turned her away despairing. Rosalia was no

sooner capable of rising from the supporting shoulder of Rossano, than she prayed to be conducted to her brother: against this, every one remonstrated; Rossano afraid of the effect Valombrosa's faint groans and perfect immobility would produce. He urged many reasons for her refraining from this visit, till at length, Rosalia caught a new alarm, and fancied that her brother was already no more.

Again Rossano had to exert all his tender rhetoric, and Signora Calvesi all his firmness and good sense, to calm her on this point: Rossano's word solemnly given, at last convinced her she had been mistaken. She trusted to him, when she would believe no other; and for his sake, (when he asked it for his own sake,) she consented to retire with Countess Zucharo to her chamber, and take his promise, that if Valombrosa grew worse, she should be immediately allowed to go to him.

Countess Zucharo all drowned in tears

of sincere compassion at the scene she witnessed, though ignorant of much that deepened its distress, received her from the hands of Rossano, who lingered ere he could relinquish her; so dear, so much more dear had a few hours made her become! it was fit, however, that she should leave him. She was led away, and he stood looking long after her, though his sight was completely obscured by tears.

It is often in a scene of distress, that the heart first learns all its own resources. Rossano who had for so long believed himself nearly exhausted of every sympathy, and destroyed by that lassitude of the soul, which makes us study much, and act little, now found himself the active principle of a whole sorrowing house.

He did every thing, and was everywhere: he seemed always by the bedside of Valombrosa, always in the melancholy cabinet of Rosalia; he was present

at every consultation of the surgeons and physicians; he saw Valombrosa's numerous dependants, and acted for them as much as possible, in the spirit of their illustrious friend; his days were spent in successive employment, his nights in anxious watching by his suffering friend; in short he seemed animated with a second soul, and suddenly endowed with superhuman strength. Rosalia meanwhile lived on the expectation, and recollection of those few moments in every day, during which she was permitted just to stand by the bed of her brother, with his cold hand clasped in her's: careful while she pressed that hand to her convulsed lip, not to let even a single tear glide to it from her cheek.

Valombrosa gave no sign of consciousness, except when she was by; and then a feeble attempt at returning the pressure of that trembling hand, showed that he knew who it was that touched him. He sometimes repeated his own faint

movement on those occasions, as if incited by some doubt, or some wish that it might prove the hand of another than Rosalia. After that, his head usually sunk heavier back upon his pillow, and his whole frame then became motionless.

His veins, indeed, had been nearly drained by the long time during which the blood had flowed, ere Rossano found him on that disastrous night; and though from that very circumstance he suffered less from fever than might have been apprehended, it kept him in a state of weakness which almost amounted to torpidity.

The question of life and death was long doubtful. Most of his medical attendants asserted that he could not live; but Calvesi and one other, after some days were over, had the boldness to predict he would recover.

The recovery of a man through whose lungs a ball had passed, was unprecedented then. It is an event which

happily has not been singular in our more scientific days: but that unprecedented event took place. Valombrosa in less than one month was decidedly pronounced out of all immediate danger, though still exposed to the probability of a consumptive complaint fixing upon his constitution.

His extreme debility, the painful oppression and irritability of the injured organ, and the occasional agonies of his mind increasing these, made it necessary for him to be confined to the unvarying temperature of one heated apartment, and dieted like an infant.

While it was possible to conceal from him the disappearance of Ippolita, Rossano had contrived to prevent him from experiencing any mental tortures in addition to those of the body: but as Valombrosa's faculties recovered their action, bringing back the remembrance of the scene and circumstances of his wound; and as he became fully sensible to the

absence of her whom he most wished to see amongst his friendly attendants, his ardent feelings caught alarm, and the rapidity and perseverance of his questions left those he addressed no avenue to escape from them.

A fever, worse than all he suffered from his wound, then seized upon him, (weakened as he was by foregone suffering,) and once more the honoured and beloved of so many hearts, lay at the point of death.

During this period, Rosalia had to practise the self-conquering lessons which she they lamented, had taught her so often and so nobly. Her hours were divided between watchings near her brother, and prayers for him and for her friend.

She prayed for that support she felt she needed; and Heaven granted her a succouring angel in the form of Rossano.

Cheered and compassionated by him, she bowed her soft head to the storm,

which else must have laid it in the dust. Providence again rewarded her submission with Valombrosa's life.

After the great crisis of his disorder, Rosalia's visits to her brother were again allowed to lengthen; till at last she established herself with him for the whole of every day; trying to evince her grateful sense of Heaven's goodness in his miraculous preservation, by inspiring him with the same hope she sought to keep alive in herself, the hope that Ippolita would be finally restored to them.

Upon this subject alone was Valombrosa at times rebellious even to phrenzy. The fearful uncertainty of Ippolita's fate, aggravated the anguish of her loss: for whether she had fallen into the hands of banditti, or into those of some ruffian worse-purposed than they, none might know. Sometimes maddened into a forgetfulness of his duty, he raved against his own sick and wounded state: but oftener he burst into passionate prayers

for the strength to seek, and the fortune to find her.

That solemn and tender vow she had made, never to belong to another,—those last words he had heard her utter, rung in his ear, alternately melting him into sorrow, or transporting him into madness. She loved him!—She had told him so!—and she was torn from him at the very moment of saying it!

Valombrosa's earliest suspicions—and how horrible they were!—of course fell upon Guidobaldo Alviano: but these Prince Angelo successfully combated after awhile. He was able to assure him that Guidobaldo was then at the head of the Venetian army, that Giuliano de Medici, who had felt the same suspicion when he received Rossano's dismal dispatch on the disappearance of his niece, had immediately used his freedom of quitting Bologna, and had, though with some delay and difficulty, reached the Venetian camp near Verona,

where he found Guidobaldo, and received from him the most prompt and solemn denial of the two acts imputed to him.

Giuliano had then repaired to Rome to young Lorenzo: and though unable to extort from him a confession of his being concerned in the outrage on his sister, the evasiveness and wrath of his replies, followed by angry repetitions of how surely she deserved such treatment from the brother she had tried to rob of his right, convinced Giuliano that Ippolita was indeed in his power. He hoped that the murderous attack upon her protector had been made without authority by whoever Lorenzo had unwarily employed.

Comforted with the idea that if what he guessed were in fact the case, Ippolita would have but to endure forced confinement, and perhaps some harsh usage from her brother, to frighten her into a formal renunciation of their disputed claim, Giuliano exhorted her friends at

Il bel Deserto to console themselves on the same grounds that he did; to believe that he, the person most deeply interested in her fate, would lose no time in beseeching the Sovereign Pontiff's order for a search through all the religious houses in Italy, (for in one of these, he imagined it likely she was immured,) and to rest satisfied that he would contrive to give them direct intelligence of the event, were he so happy as to discover her.

Meanwhile it was not impossible but that some of the agents he was employing in this business, might draw from Lorenzo's confidential servants, matter sufficient for Giuliano to have him privately arrested, on suspicion of having spirited away his niece, whom, in the character of guardian as well as uncle, he was entitled to demand by law.

In the hopes, and fears, and expectations which these views of De Medici's gave birth to, the time wore away; and those five months passed during which

Ippolita had languished at the watch-tower, been providentially delivered by Baron Wernheim, and finally conducted by him into Germany.

Meanwhile Valombrosa was cautiously removed, first into a more airy apartment, then permitted to breathe the outward air at noon, and at length suffered to dare the motion of a litter.

Often recurring to that secret grief which had gnawed at his heart, ere this last calamity overwhelmed him, his countenance at times wore an expression which certainly belonged to something more horrible than the loss of Ippolita, so softened, as it might be termed now. It was impatient anguish, unmixed with aught of tenderness or hope: and the convulsive sigh which wrung him at those times, reminded Rossano that his friend's heart had yet one dark abyss unfathomed. This was not a period to press him on any matter likely to create internal conflicts; and therefore, though Ros-

sano earnestly desired to know if advice or assistance might benefit the brother of Rosalia, he forbore to ask his confidence. He had enough to do to keep alive the trust, both of Valombrosa and his sister, in the conviction of Giuliano that Ippolita would be found securely lodged in some obscure nunnery.

In the closeness of their present intercourse, Rossano hourly saw more in the pure and unobtrusive virtues of Rosalia to admire and cherish. Although in thinking of one frail and fair creature, he had once said with Claudio,

> " For thee, I'll lock up all the gates of love,
> " And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang,
> " To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm."

Yet the struggle Rosalia had maintained against her tender constitution, and yet tenderer heart, had been so unboastful and sincere; and her triumph had proceeded so entirely from the force of christian principles, that while it assured him

of her conquest in every future contest between human frailty and divine commands, it yet left her all that soft weakness which is so touching to man, so flattering to his power of protection, and so lovely in itself.

If religion might be said to lift her above earth, it was still but like a trembling dove upborne on the wings of an eagle: she was neither strong nor confident, nor aspiring of herself. Her soft weakness subdued his philosophy and his prejudice.

Rossano had lately curbed his affections to the utmost; the very force he had exerted had enfeebled him; and when once he relaxed his hold, they broke from him, spurning controul.

All devoted to Rosalia and her brother, and consequently enjoying a sort of happiness of which he had not known the taste for many bitter years, Rossano was now every day what he had once appeared, but at distant intervals, — a man whose

existence depended upon the affections of others.

Rosalia clung to him, as to her natural prop: and though his fondness still spoke with no other tongue than silent watchfulness and endearing sympathies, — though it appeared but in his hovering step, his occasional pressure of her innocently-extended hand, his full sigh of overflowing satisfaction, and the peculiar intonation of his voice when he addressed her, — it was distinctly felt by her, and seen by her brother.

Rosalia's own guileless attachment required no comment. It was ever in her mantling cheek, and brightening eye, and fluttering voice, when Rossano approached: so perfectly indeed was it understood by its object, that there wanted but that moment to arrive in which feeling and propriety would permit Rossano to take her willing hand and lead her to the altar.

For that moment Rossano was con-

tented to wait, since they enjoyed, even now, ample measure of each other's society; and there existed such causes for anxiety respecting Valombrosa and Ippolita, that he would scarcely have dared to appropriate to himself so much felicity.

A rumour of Guidobaldo Alviano's death had reached Florence, and caused, in spite of humaner promptings, an emotion of joy in Valombrosa, who was waiting with perturbation the result of Giuliano de Medici's scrutiny of the religious houses yet unvisited, when Prince Angelo received a summons from his steward at Camaldoli.

He was informed that a monk was there, who demanded to see him on a matter of importance, excusing himself from seeking the Prince at the residence of another.

Rossano obeyed the summons.

When he reached his own house, after a ride of two or three hours, he found

there, one of the monks of Tersato, who delivered into his hand a packet of papers: it contained the letter from Baron Wernheim to his cousin, which by Ippolita's desire was enclosed in one from her to Prince Angelo. She had wished this, from the consideration, that it might hereafter prove of vital importance to Valombrosa, (should any political intrigues take place at Florence, agreeable to her brother's predictions,) that no proof could be brought of a direct communication having passed between him and one of the proscribed family. She had therefore feared to hazard his name on the superscription of such a packet.

To Rossano as the native subject of another government, she might safely write; and as such, she had prayed Wernheim to enclose his packet for Valombrosa to the same friend, commissioning the person charged with its delivery to give it up only to Prince Angelo, under his own roof.

The contents of this packet surprised Rossano with joy: he knew that it would be life and health for Valombrosa; and it was most welcome to himself, as a relief from the dismal imaginings which had begun to haunt him as time wore away, convents were searched, servants sifted, and Ippolita yet unheard-of.

He bestowed upon the bearer, refreshment, and reward, and thanks; and leaving him to the leisure enjoyment of them all, hastened back to *Il bel Deserto*.

When he reached the private entrance, the Prince threw himself off his horse, after a midnight ride, with as buoyant an air as Valombrosa had in his happiest days; but his animation was speedily checked, when the servants told him that their master was ill, and that Signor Calvesi, greatly alarmed at his sudden seizure, had been with him some hours: the Signora Rosalia, happily, was gone to rest.

Rossano turned into an anti-room, and

questioned one of the men more particularly: it was old Marco he addressed.

Marco with his customary officiousness, hastened to ease his own heart, by informing the Prince, that shortly after his departure, a person who had more than once been at *Il bel Deserto*, but whose name he knew not, had presented himself at the gates, requiring admittance to his Lord: that he had been resolutely refused, referring him to Prince Angelo's return the next day: that this person had then insisted upon a certain slip of paper being taken in to the Marquis, with these words written on it, — *The Fast of St. Magdalen*; and that upon seeing it, his lord though evidently under strong agitation, ordered the man into his presence.

Their interview was private and brief, Marco added, and the person left *Il bel Deserto* immediately: but scarcely was he gone, than Valombrosa appeared quite light-headed and out of himself, and in short was seized in so strange a manner,

that his page Celio ran for Signor Calvesi; and it was only now that he might be called at all composed.

Shocked and alarmed, Prince Rossano sent to beg Calvesi would favour him with his company for a few moments: and the request was complied with.

There was an appearance of melancholy reserve in all the Signor's replies to Rossano's earnest questions, which kept up the apprehension his assertions were calculated to allay. Calvesi indeed remembered enough of the past, to feel that he was not warranted in speaking upon a subject which his patron had forbidden him to pry into, or comment on; and he therefore declared Valombrosa's indisposition but the consequence of too much mental exertion on some troublesome business, he presumed of the person's who had visited him: assured Prince Angelo that his Lord's nerves were now composed; and that consequently he need not delay a moment,

the agreeable intelligence he had to communicate.

With spirits much damped by this evidently guarded account, Prince Angelo proceeded to the chamber of Valombrosa, whom he found thrown on his couch, pale and exhausted, his brows contracted with recent suffering, while Celio sat by, in patient and dejected observation.

Rossano dismissed the boy, and then after very brief preparation showed Ippolita's letter.

The amazement, the joy, the transport of Valombrosa cannot be painted; the evils from which she had escaped, though but sketched by her pen, and the circumstance of her deliverance having been effected by his own kinsman, were blessings of such magnitude, that by contemplating them, whatever had just tortured him was obliterated.

"Mine! mine once more!" he exclaimed aloud, straining the letter to his

bounding heart; then glowing with immediate shame, he turned on Rossano a countenance of which the manliness was not disgraced, either by the glow or the moisture of it; and as instantly averting it, he said in an agitated voice, "Leave me awhile Angelo,—this foolish excess of joy" — he could not finish the sentence.

The Prince smiled on him, and giving his hand a cordial pressure, went out without speaking.

When Rossano re-entered, he found Valombrosa sitting on the side of his couch with the precious letter in his hand. His flushed eyes, even more than his raised colour, showed that he had given entire way to his feelings; and such a smile as none had seen him wear for many months, was on his lips, restoring to his appearance for the time it lasted, all its former brightness.

At Rossano's approach he raised his head, the smile brightening as he did so, yet the moisture gathering again in his

eyes. With one trembling hand he confusedly drew his hair more forward over his brow, while with the other he pushed back a lamp that burnt near him. Rossano honoured the manly shame or delicacy which dictated this movement, and with equal delicacy he looked another way, and asked some unimportant question about Baron Wernheim.

Valombrosa, after answering he knew not what, then inquired if Rosalia were yet acquainted with Heaven's goodness to them? This question produced a discussion of what was best to be done upon the present occasion, by all concerned; and it was decided, that as Valombrosa must not (even had he strength for a rapid journey) go whither Rossano might, and as it was probable the letter Ippolita mentioned having dispatched to her uncle Giuliano, was following him from place to place, Rossano should set out the next day to seek De Medici near Mirondola, whither he knew he was going; and

then repair, either with or without him, to Inspruck.

Prince Angelo waited only till Rosalia rose with the lark, that he might share the anxious pleasure of imparting these glad tidings to her. When she did hear them, her joy was more dangerous than her grief had been; for against the latter she roused herself, and before the suddenness and force of the other, she fell at once.

The task of soothing one so agitated, is however easier to surrounding friends: they have but to endeavour at moderating the transports of the too-happy person, by diverting their attention from the main object itself, to as many of the smaller circumstances connected with it, as may be possible.

Prince Angelo acting upon this principle, speculated on the event of Ippolita's application to the Emperor, on the fortunate accident which had introduced her to Baron Wernheim, and lastly drew

Valombrosa into something like a detail of their imperfect acquaintance.

The kind stratagem took effect, for Rosalia listened with interest to what was said of a relation whom she had never seen, but whose character evidently appeared of a high order, and was doubly important to her as influencing the fortunes of her friend.

When the painful solicitude which her first extreme emotion had excited in her brother, began to subside, Rossano looked at her as she sat weeping at times, hysterically, between them, and thought what a fragile flower it was, thus at the mercy of every beam, as of every breath: too hot a sun, or too chill an air, would wither her in a moment.

"Sweet and tender lilly!" he thought to himself, "I will try to shelter thee here!" and pressing his hand upon his breast, he sighed away the words that were following.

An audible and startling sigh from

Valombrosa then called Rossano's attention to him; he saw that his eyes were fixed upon the same interesting object that engaged his own, and with that intenseness which proves the gazer no longer conscious of what he is doing.

Valombrosa sighed again, and spoke; but it was like one sighing and speaking in his sleep. "If scarcely this," he said in a deep inward voice, "how could she have borne that dreadful tale? — No — I was not wrong after all!"

Rossano hastily laid hold of his arm: "Valombrosa, what are you talking of?" he whispered, and he glanced at Rosalia.

Valombrosa rose in great disorder; passed his hands wildly over his brow; and drawing one or two gasping breaths ere he replied, uttered a few evasive words by way of apology.

Rosalia anxiously inquired if her brother were well? At that question he took her in his arms and fondly soothed her; spoke of Ippolita; called himself a

man whose wits were unsettled with joy; and avoiding the fixture of Rossano's asking eye, urged his prompt departure.

The Prince shook his head with a meaning evidently understood by the person for whom it was intended, for Valombrosa's ashy cheek grew crimson; squeezed his hand, then commending him and Rosalia to each other's care during his absence, tore himself away.

Rossano found Giuliano de Medici as he had hoped, in his progress through Modena, vainly searching the religious houses there, for his lost niece. With as deep but less turbulent joy than his younger friend, De Medici received the tidings of Ippolita's rescue by Baron Wernheim, and the events consequent on it. He saw the immediate necessity of joining her in Tyrol, and willingly accepting the society of Prince Angelo, hastened with him to Inspruck.

There he was received by the Emperor Maximilian and his ministers, with the

favour Wernheim had assured him of: and anxious not to hazard the loss of what his niece had been so long pursuing for the sake of so many unfortunates, he relinquished the immediate comfort of going to her, but speeded Rossano with his news, while he remained to pass through the forms and scrutiny required, ere they would put him in possession of the disputed inheritance.

Ippolita heard parts of this long detail, as given her by Prince Angelo, with the most earnest and animated attention: parts escaped her; for often did her thoughts hurry forward to conjectures about the future, and agitating wishes that she might dare to see her dearest friends again.

The letter from Valombrosa was unopened in her hand: Rossano saw her wistfully looking at it: he smiled, and kindly urged her to leave him, and study its contents alone. Ippolita blushingly obeyed.

In the solitude of her chamber she opened that letter. Its purport may be imagined.

Valombrosa wrote to recal to her the promise she had voluntarily made him on the night they were so direfully separated, of bestowing herself eventually but upon him, or else dedicating herself to Heaven. He renewed the assurance that he was not unworthy of her love: but even while he vehemently declared that life would be hateful to him unless supported by the hope of future union with her, he confessed that it was not his purpose to entreat her thus to bless him, until he could ascertain one piece of important information, upon which would depend whether he could then offer her a heart relieved from the heaviest part of its present grievous load, or must throw himself on her compassion as a man whose whole after existence must be poisoned by one bitter recollection.

He spoke of the prospects of her family with less sanguineness than formerly: but he urged the certainty of his obtaining the republic's leave to marry one of the house of Medici, from that very cause; instancing the fact of Strozzi having been pardoned for a clandestine union with her half-sister; and drawing a good omen from several conversations which had passed lately between him and a nephew of Soderini's about the exiled family. But this consent, he added, was not likely to be granted but on one condition; that of her seeing her relations only in states beyond the jurisdiction of Florence; and permitting their correspondence to pass under the eye of the Gonfaloniere himself. This was a displeasing exaction he confessed; but he fondly hoped that as it did not actually militate against the duty and affection she owed her uncle, it might be balanced in her heart by the conviction of constituting the chief happiness of the man

she had blessed with the confession of an equal attachment; he therefore ventured to press his suit with all the ardour of love.

If she consented to what he proposed, as a sea-voyage was strenuously recommended for the restoration of his strength, and as an object he wanted to reach, lay beyond seas, he would immediately set forth with his sister, and Prince Angelo, who had offered to accompany them; while he trusted Ippolita would remain at the convent of Santa Barbara, under the care of its prioress, and within reach of his cousin's protection.

By this arrangement, she would be sheltered from all the vicissitudes which the stormy war gave birth to in Italy; would consequently leave her uncles greater freedom of action; and would be so entirely beyond the reach of her brother's resentment, that her most apprehensive friends could not nourish any rational fears on her account.

These wishes Valombrosa pressed with all the force and tenderness of a man whose whole happiness is bound up in the object they sue for; but he delicately forbore to urge what he had endured for her sake: too generous to say, indeed too devoted to feel that any thing but her own free promise gave him a claim on her affections.

Ippolita read this letter again and again: and that with such tumultuous beatings of the heart, that they confused her perceptions. She only saw and felt that now the realization of the wish nearest her soul, the wish hitherto believed desperate, was for the first time presented to her in a tangible shape.

If Valombrosa's love for her, and duty to his government, could be reconciled, —if the Florentine republic did not exact from her greater sacrifices than he described as probable, and if Valombrosa returned from the unknown errand he went on, then might she be at last the

blissful thing she considered most blissful — the wife of Valombrosa!

Her blood thrilled, her heart almost stopped within her at that thought. "Oh, let him but return — whether sorrowful or soothed," she said to herself, "will he not be equally dear to me? — Yes, Valombrosa, I am thine whatever thou mayest be. Rather would I weep with thee through life, than rejoice with any other! Yet sure none so excellent, none so beloved as thou wilt then know thyself, can be for ever unhappy."

She mixed tears and kisses over his precious letter; and if a pang of keen regret now and then crossed her at the thought that she must be so long without seeing the beloved writer, that she must not encounter with him the dangers of the element he was about to embark on, — that she must not watch and wait by his languid couch, — she banished it by the reflection that he would go accom-

panied by the truest of friends and the fondest of sisters.

After many efforts to compose her agitated spirits, she at length succeeded, and rejoined Prince Angelo.

Ippolita had no reserves with that faithful friend, and she gave him Valombrosa's letter to read.

Rossano perused it attentively, returned it with a smile of encouragement, and asked her whether she could hesitate about answering it as the writer wished.

The smile and the question calmed the perturbation with which Ippolita had contemplated his possible disapprobation. She had feared that her own judgment was blinded by her inclination; but now that he sanctioned both, she ventured to confess her willingness to enter into the engagement Valombrosa sought.

Further discussion of the subject made her still more satisfied with her decision: and then anxiously inquiring the destin-

ation of Valombrosa, she learnt that it was the Island of Rhodes.

A voyage of some length towards a still warmer climate than that of Italy, Rossano said, had been insisted on by Valombrosa's physicians as the only means of perfectly restoring his health; and that after resisting their importunities for some time, he had suddenly acceded to them, fixed upon Rhodes as the place he would go to; and having assured himself that his sister's constitution would be strengthened by the means prescribed for his own, finally yielded to her wish of accompanying him.

"And you go with them, my Prince?" asked Ippolita touchingly.

"My heart would go with them," was Rossano's answer, "and why should my person stay behind?" He smiled, but his colour mounted, and Ippolita's meaning smile in return, assured him that she was pleased with the idea that heightened colour awakened.

As Rossano was impatient for Valombrosa's sake to return into Italy, the moment his commission of seeing her was executed, he now informed her that he waited only for reply to the letter he brought, ere he did so; and that knowing her uncle so near, he would leave her as contentedly as though he saw her under his immediate care.

A few moments after this, spent alone, were sufficient for Ippolita to write the consent Valombrosa sought.

With what transport did she offer to share any destiny with him, which might leave his honour unviolated, and preserve for her the right of occasionally seeing her dearest relatives beyond the boundaries of Florence! She mixed this consent with prayers for his safety and success in the expedition he was about to undertake: and addressing a tender message to Rosalia, poured out that overflowing tenderness upon her, which deli-

cacy and propriety forbade her to address immediately to Valombrosa himself.

When she gave this letter to Rossano, with sudden and involuntary misgiving, she inwardly breathed over it a tearful prayer, that the hopes it dwelt on might not be disappointed. Rossano saw by her looks what was the feeling struggling within her, and he reproved her trembling hand and fading lip with gentle seriousness.

Many were the adieus which then passed between them: for still, as Prince Angelo was going, Ippolita had some other question to ask, or some other message to send, which stayed his departing steps. She blushed at her own unwillingness to lose sight of the friend of Valombrosa and Rosalia; but while she could retain him it seemed as though she possessed a part of them; and upon the details he gave her of all they did and all they thought, she was to live for many, many months.

Rossano at length departed, and she was left, alternately to regret that he was gone, and to anticipate the joy of meeting that dear uncle from whom she had been separated under such sad circumstances.

It was in vain that Ippolita tried to think principally of this dear relation, and of the sacred delight she must derive from the power of dispensing the legacy of her father. The image of Valombrosa for ever broke in on these contemplations; alternately as she had first seen and loved him, bright with health and happiness, or as she had lately beheld, and still fancied him, touchingly pale, sad, and subdued. But under both forms he was still the Valombrosa she loved, the Valombrosa from whom nothing now could divorce her affections. Under every change, still in her eyes the dearest and the best.

As she dwelt fondly upon the recollected grace of his manly figure, upon

the alternate cloud and sunshine of his interesting brow, as she pressed his letter to her lips and to her breast, she would have blushed to feel how much she loved, had she not felt how greatly he deserved.

She thought, that had she known this matchless creature, without having touched his heart, or had he deemed it right to struggle in secret against his untold passion, that which now made her felicity, would then have sealed her misery; since to know Valombrosa, and to prefer him to all mankind, was in her mind the same thing.

It is so hard, to love without hope, and in the fear of being disliked or despised by the object.

But what was her gratitude now? and how sincerely did she acknowledge, that for all her sufferings, the certainty of being dearest to him, was more than a compensation!

Prince Angelo had left her a large

hoard of affecting and consoling details, with which to beguile the short time that elapsed ere she saw her uncle. These she mused over in her few intervals of privacy: for not even the delight of thinking upon those most precious to her, could seduce Ippolita from the duties she had voluntarily undertaken to share with the charitable sisters of mercy.

A very few days had stolen away, since the departure of Rossano, when she received a joyful summons to leave the pillow of a sleeping patient, and meet her uncle in the parlour.

She flew, winged with eager affection. De Medici was waiting her at the entrance: his eyes, his heart, his arms, all welcomed her. She fell into those arms, and as she felt herself almost convulsively pressed to that excellent heart, her tears flooded his bosom and mingled with the streaming tide of his.

The meeting was as awful as touching:

so many recollections were crowded into that moment; so much of sorrow, and so much of joy: the relation between the two persons, was of so affecting a nature, that words were denied them, and they wept long and unreservedly.

"My child! my Ippolita!" were the first sounds Ippolita heard from the lips she had ever listened to with equal reverence and affection: for though Giuliano de Medici's years did not challenge veneration, the sanctity of his character, and the mild sway of his manner, gave him the authority of age.

When released from his paternal embrace, Ippolita seized his hand, and kissed it repeatedly; accompanying each action with some broken expressions of joy at seeing him still looking like what he had been.

None, indeed, who had then looked on De Medici would have imagined that he had passed a life of anxiety and disappointment: his cheek was pale 'tis true,

but that might be the paleness of study, or constitution, for

"Sublimely raised to heaven, his brow appears
"The shrine of peace; and like a sun-gilt height,
"Where never earthly mist obscured the light,
"Above the stormy world its tranquil summit
"rears."

That placid smile of every feature, which diffuses something of its own spirit over all that note it, — which seems mildly to reprove more turbulent characters, was still the peculiar distinction of his countenance; and Ippolita happily looked in vain for those furrows of care, and channels of tears, which so often change a well-known face, and pierce the souls of them that contemplate it.

De Medici attentively considered her altered appearance: the forms and colours of her face and figure he found, indeed, blown into more exceeding beauty than when they parted eighteen months before, in the convent of the Spirito Santo, but the print of deep and direful agitations

was on her countenance. He sought in vain for that vestal stillness of complexion, that sublime absence of all strong expression but that of self-conquering resolution, for which she was once remarkable: her complexion and her eyes had all the movement of her excited soul.

She was changed much in her appearance — little in fact: her soul had been always as sensitive as now, though hitherto she had shrouded its emotions under a discipline which had begun in the necessity of her fate, and been continued from habit and from principle. Since she had known Valombrosa, — since a new and powerful affection had taken possession of her bosom, Ippolita had lost sight of her own security, in the deeper interest of thinking and feeling for him; and as all the evils that menaced herself became of tenfold importance, after she knew that his happiness depended upon her; she had felt those evils more, and

resisted therefore, rather than yielded to them.

De Medici pressed her suddenly to his breast again, after a moment's survey. "Thou art changed, my child!" he said indulgently, "and the change I fear will not be for thy peace in this world."

"Will it unfit me for another?" asked Ippolita, tremulously, casting down her eyes abashed and conscious.

"I am sure it will not!" replied De Medici with emphasis, "but there are affections, my Ippolita, of which the indulgence is to be purchased at a high price—the price of self-dominion. I would not, however, wish thee to unlearn the new lesson thou hast learned: he that has won thy heart is worthy of it; and my blessing will be on thee both, whenever he can obtain the privilege he seeks, of giving thee a home in Florence."

"Dearest uncle!" and Ippolita all dyed with blushes, rivetted her lips upon his hand. There was a pause of some

moments between them, ere either of them spoke again. Ippolita herself changed the subject from her own peculiar interest to those of others: she enquired into the conduct of the Emperor with regard to the business of her uncle's journey, and learned with transport, that all the forms were gone through, the proceedings registered, and the debt paid.

After the first ebullition of grateful emotion, she hastened to enter with her uncle into the merits and necessities of the various persons whom she chose to consider as legal claimants upon this recovered treasure.

This discussion carried them far; and was connected with so many painful events long past, was so closely interwoven with the remembrance of Piero de Medici, that both uncle and niece found it left them incapacitated from the discussion of any other subject for the remainder of that day: they agreed, therefore, to adjourn all other agitating themes,

and ramble out together into the valley, to tranquillize themselves among the peaceful beauties of nature.

The rules of Santa Barbara were not strict, they were dictated by rational piety and judicious benevolence, and as their convent frequently sheltered the sick herdsman, and plundered traveller, the prioress feared not to bring scandal on herself, by permitting De Medici to inhabit that quarter of it appropriated to strangers, and the good ecclesiastic who officiated as confessor.

By this means, Ippolita not only saw and conversed with her uncle at easy intervals through many days, but had the gratification of bringing him acquainted with her faithful Renati.

It had long been a wish of her heart to attach Renati to that dear uncle's service, by the bonds of personal affection, and by the conviction that he was the best fitted to fill that place in Florence which her poor father had forfeited, and which

her brother Lorenzo, from his inexperience and violence, was not likely, if attained, to maintain a single hour. She wished Renati to understand, that as the power of the Medici had ever been conditional, and voluntarily given by the Florentines, it was grounded solely on the worthiness of the possessor, not upon hereditary right; and that, as such, her uncle Giuliano, the one best loved, and most reverenced, the one whose moderation and abilities were acknowledged by all parties, the one whom Piero himself had ever taught his son to regard as the proper head of the republic, was the real representative of his father.

This view of the subject once adopted by Renati, she hoped that, self-divorced from Lorenzo's service by indignation at his dishonourable conduct, he would attach himself by principle and will to the person of her uncle; and with such a faithful, though humble friend, Ippolita thought she could bear to hear of his

re-entrance into the strife and the struggle of new enterprises.

Her affectionate wishes were not disappointed. Renati's good-will was quickly won by the mixed benignity and cheerfulness of De Medici's manners; and his own inflexible hatred of falsehood, made him but the more admire the other's perfect truth in speech and conduct.

Renati was pleased also with the opportunity of gratifying Ippolita, whose earnestness to place his rough integrity in its fairest light upon all occasions, could not fail of affecting him; and whose well-being was now become a part of his honest heart. When, therefore, it drew near the time for De Medici's departure, Renati made it his suit to be allowed permission to enter his service, whenever any force was on foot for the prosecution of the family cause; that until then he craved leave to remain near Ippolita, her watch-dog, as he expressed it, in a land of strangers.

Both these requests were granted; and as no active duty did indeed summon Renati, Ippolita felt that his vicinity to her, and occasional conversation, would be both a comfort and a protection.

During her retired walks with her uncle among the surrounding mountains, Ippolita naturally enquired much about the prospects of her family. De Medici wished neither to deceive nor depress her: he simply stated facts, suggested hopes, and finally taught her to trust every thing implicitly to the wisdom and goodness of God.

Ippolita heard, with something like a sense of relief, that she had no immediate prospect of great anxiety respecting her uncle's personal safety: the cause of the Medici was laid aside at present, to make way for the greater concerns of France and Germany, Venice, and the Holy See.

The Pope was indeed sincerely inclined to erect their standard again, and sup-

port it with all his might; but his own affairs were going so ill, that he was obliged to smother his schemes in their favour. France, successful, encroaching France, supported Soderini, so that until her fortune turned, or some greater power threw its weight into the scale of Rome and Venice, to agitate the question of who was to rule in Florence, would be folly.

The object itself, however, was not abandoned by the Medici, nor by their friends: and Giuliano informed his niece that he was secretly commissioned by His Holiness to proceed into Switzerland, to engage the Switzers if possible in the quarrel; and thence into England, for the purpose of rousing its King's jealousy of the growing fame of his rival Louis XII., consequently of winning him over to the opposite interests.

These commissions, added to the pleasing office of dispensing the bounty, or rather acquitting the debts of gratitude

and compensation which Ippolita owed to her father's scattered followers, necessarily limited the time De Medici had then to bestow, and must take him from her for an indefinite period.

To this necessity both uncle and niece submitted without vain murmurs. Refreshed in soul by this short enjoyment of each other's society, they prepared for a cheerful endurance of another long separation, commencing under auspices so much happier than the last.

The time of parting arrived: none would have guessed it a parting, to have seen the looks and manner of De Medici.

The placid light of his countenance taught Ippolita to disperse the shades that were gathering over her's; and his discourse, full of business and kindness, and grateful assurance that all would do well eventually, had a better effect in strengthening her fortitude, than any exhortations to patience and hope.

De Medici repeatedly regretted that their different duties and destinations rendered it impossible for him to see and thank either of Ippolita's generous friends, by whom he meant Valombrosa and Baron Wernheim. But he spoke of doing so at a future period; and said this in a tone of such mild confidence, that she who had always been accustomed to consider his words as oracles, found herself insensibly animated by the same trust in the future.

De Medici drew for her on the blank leaf of her missal, as it lay by, a slight map of the seas through which her friends from *Il bel Deserto* were going, as well as those he was himself to cross. He described to her the country and the people of England, amongst whom he had travelled in his boyish days; and he entered into minute accounts of the Island of Rhodes, and the famed order to which it then belonged.

He was affectionately anxious to afford

her a variety of minor circumstances to think over, connected with the objects of her keenest anxiety, yet sufficiently new and interesting in themselves, to stimulate her by that novelty and that interest into speculations which might occasionally give a wholesome distraction to her thoughts.

Ippolita listened to her uncle's explanations, and took the map which suggested them, with tearful pleasure. She knew that this map was destined to be her study in many a solitary moment; and these details her consolation, while calculating the leagues of land and sea which would soon divide her from all she loved.

De Medici would not let her dwell an instant upon the painful part of the present. With a serene and comforting aspect, and in a tone of kind playfulness, he asked her if she had given away so much, in the treasure just assigned to the exiles, that she could not afford her

uncle the poor keepsake of a single smile? And as she gave him through tears, the smile he asked, while hanging fondly on his neck, he told her that a few minutes would make her sorrow folly.

"Parting over," he said, "then we may begin to think of meeting again: the tide from that moment is turned, and ebbing fast back to joy. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, my Ippolita, steals away another and another day from those which are to separate us. Let us grow the cheerfuller then every day, not the sadder. Remember that constant tears will wash out even nature's own painting; and as my Ippolita has now some one to be handsome for, she must not weep away this 'fair war' of white and red in her cheeks."

There was inexpressible tenderness in the tone of De Medici's voice as he sportively uttered this: but no tear evidenced weaker feelings; and the farewell bene-

diction he gave at last, was bestowed in the midst of cheerful predictions.

Ippolita kissed both the honoured hands by which he held her's on the threshold of Santa Barbara, with a fervor proportionate to the strength of those regrets she was mastering. She felt that with the last look of that serenely smiling aspect, the confidence it infused would sink: it would disappear like the light with the setting sun!

Again her uncle strained her to his paternal breast, and that time he spoke not. Ippolita felt the meaning of his silence; and closing her eyes lest the tears which flooded them should gush out after all, she turned away her head, and giving De Medici's hand a hasty but fervent pressure, broke from his relaxing hold.

De Medici looked after her for a few moments, ejaculated a benediction in which others were included, and grate-

fully inclining his head to the farewell of the Prioress, and of Renati, (with whom he had previously conversed at large,) turned his mule towards Italy.

CHAPTER XXV.

This parting past, and Ippolita left alone to think over the rapid events of the last eight weeks, (for so long it was since she had quitted Istria,) her thoughts began to recover something like order and steadiness. She was able to take a fair estimate of all the bright and dark in her prospects, and to decide that if she had much to dread, she had yet more to hope: and for what infinite consolation had she not reason to bless the hand of Almighty Goodness!

It is true, she was denied even a momentary sight of those dear friends who were so soon to embark for another land; but she had seen Prince Angelo and her uncle, and the sight of them had

strengthened the spirit, which perhaps as brief an interview with Rosalia and her brother, might have left weakened by excess of tenderness. — She was assured by Valombrosa that he quitted his country not merely for health, but in the hope of regaining a richer treasure, peace of mind: and if he returned with that, would not the blessing be cheaply purchased by anxious feelings now?

Every reflection upon these benefits was another and another call for cheerful acquiescence under this temporary separation; so that as the days flowed by, she combated impatient regrets, not only by her uncle's suggested idea, that each brought them nearer the hour of meeting, but by a genuine sentiment of thankful submission.

Among the sisters of Santa Barbara, were many with whom Ippolita associated in their exemplary duties, with perfect fellowship; but often that communion of spirit nearly ceased. She shrank from

troubling the holy calm of their minds, by discussing subjects which however pure and laudable in themselves, were too deeply tinctured with human affections, and her own personal views perhaps, to appear quite blameless in their eyes. She therefore generally walked and meditated alone; or sometimes accepted the society of a young boarder, whose artless character and affectionate manners, though unaccompanied by Rosalia's loveliness, often reminded her of that cherished friend.

Agatha Reichenhall was the only child of a widowed officer, and since her mother's death was accustomed to reside in one or other religious house whenever he was on service. She had an interesting dark countenance, of which the only beauties were a pair of rather melancholy but exceedingly expressive black eyes; and a mouth, of which the many surrounding dimples, showed that nature

had originally intended even her eyes for smiles.

From the first day of Ippolita's appearance among the Sisters of Mercy, this young person had evinced an uncommon interest in her: at first, observing her distantly, with shy respect and admiration, and at length, approaching her person and her friendship by numberless little acts of attention and sympathy.

It was impossible for Ippolita not to see and feel this: and as Agatha, if not highly cultivated, had a quick apprehension of every new subject, and was by nature an enthusiast in all that awakened her feelings, Ippolita indulged with her, in those lively expressions of delight at the beauties of creation, and in those infinite speculations upon characters and events, which keep our faculties and sensibilities in beneficial exercise, and fit us for understanding, and disciplining, and guiding ourselves.

So new an acquaintance, however ami-

able, was not admitted to Ippolita's confidence; Agatha therefore only knew that Ippolita's uncle was going beyond sea, and that her return to the world depended upon the restoration of her family to their rank in Florence. But she watched the wind for her; and whenever she heard from her father, ran to report the news he sent from the seat of war.

Ippolita received these testimonies of affection with amiable acknowledgements; and as they gave proof of sensibility and observation in Agatha, felt that her own deeper feelings and reflections would not be addressed in vain to such a companion.

An accidental circumstance by attaching a particular interest to Agatha, not only redoubled Ippolita's kindness for her, but awakening a hope of being serviceable, gave the latter a motive sufficiently powerful to detach her thoughts frequently from their ineffectual pursuit of dearer and more distant persons.

The poor girl was one day detected by a severe sister in the act of writing verses. The act itself was heathenish and abominable; the subject much more so: and as such, (Sister Clara having noised it through the whole convent,) the Prioress was obliged to censure Agatha more awfully, and punish her more severely, than she would otherwise have done.

So dark were the frowns of Sister Clara, when she spoke on the subject to Ippolita, and so fierce her reprobation of the young girl's double crime — presumption and immodesty, that Ippolita might have imagined there was indeed some reprehensible levity in Agatha's fancy, had not the face of the trembling victim, all covered with blushes, and her voice anxiously praying that the verses might be shown her friend to convince her that at least she was not guilty of wickedness, made Ippolita dismiss every sentiment but compassion.

She had at first put by the paper on

which the guilty lines were written, unauthorised, she thought, to read even a girl's silliest effusions, when intended for no other eye than that of her own; but as Agatha conjured her to read them, that she might add her kind voice to those that meant to plead for her, and as she stammered out some apology for having addressed them as she had done, Ippolita cast her eyes on the paper, and seeing the words, "to Wernheim," written in small characters, would have read no further, but stimulated by a new interest, and previously permitted, she went on as follows: —

"If thou art to be won by eyes
All darkly bright like polar skies;
By lips that glow with morning's red,
And cheeks, the rose's blushes spread;
By locks in rich luxuriance tost
O'er brows no care hath ever cross'd; —
Then art thou her's, and I am lost!

"If gayest youth thy heart may lure;
If thoughts triumphant, proud, secure;
Exulting vanity, which ne'er
Knew the soft sigh, fond blush, sad tear;

If beauty by itself engrossed,
The conquest of thy soul may boast,—
Then art thou her's, and I am lost!

"But if unboastful eyes that shine
Never, but when reflecting thine;
If cheeks that glow, and lips that smile,
Only when thou art by the while;
If truest heart in humblest breast,
May win thy bosom's noble guest,—
Then art thou mine, and I am blest!"

The looks of Agatha when Ippolita gently returned these verses to Sister Clara, with some extenuating, or rather pleading words, convinced her that their subject was deep in the poor girl's heart; and the first time they were alone together, (after Agatha's solitary confinement was over,) she received from her, in answer to enquiries dictated by benevolent compassion, a short account of her feelings and situation.

Baron Wernheim, she was told, had first become known to Agatha through the medium of her father's letters, when both were shut up in a besieged town,

where the former commanded. The details of Wernheim's intrepid and masterly conduct, coupled with affecting instances of his personal kindness to prisoners and inferiors, laid the foundation of perfect respect and admiration in her heart; future events added to both, till a stronger affection rose unperceived upon that foundation.

In a subsequent field of battle, her father and the Baron were wounded at the same time, and carried with others into the same hospital. There Wernheim's best qualities developed themselves; his disregard of self, his calm endurance of pain and privations, his mastery over all natural disgusts and aversions when by the conquest of them, he could render the slightest service to his fellow-sufferers; all these excited his companion's esteem, and caused him to renew his praises of him to Agatha.

The advanced age of Colonel Reichenhall, particularly attracted Wernheim's

kindness, and relinquishing to him every comfort which his own military and civil rank secured for himself, he slept on straw, and dieted with the common wounded, to afford the veteran a soft mattress, and more delicate food. In short Baron Wernheim's humanity had saved her father's life, or at least Agatha thought so; and when after their campaign he came into Bavaria to pay the visit his grateful friend had won him to promise, Agatha confessed that his dignified manners, and manly deportment, (so like her ideas of a knight in the days of early chivalry,) had finished the conquest begun by his great qualities.

But while others (who said so perhaps because they wished it) told her that her father's friend was considering her with more than ordinary interest, the beautiful daughter of a neighbouring Bavarian appeared, evidently ambitious of the prize Agatha secretly sighed for: and when the latter came into Saltzburgh to

board among the nuns of Mercy, while her father resumed his military duties in Friuli, she left Baron Wernheim without being quite assured, yet sadly dreading it, that his heart was given and accepted, where she wished it might never have fixed.

Ippolita remembered that the name which had been uttered by the Prioress to her friend, when he first brought her to Santa Barbara, was the same that Agatha gave to this formidable rival: his acknowledging colour at that time, convinced her that poor Agatha had nothing to hope; and she grieved for her, but yet more grieved for Wernheim himself, when she drew from Agatha a fuller description of the woman upon whom it was probable his future honour and happiness were to depend.

From Agatha's reluctant confessions, Ippolita discovered that ambition, and an insatiable thirst for power, were the springs of this Beauty's actions: for she

notoriously encouraged addresses which she afterwards rejected when nobler game was started. This, however, was a circumstance unknown to Baron Wernheim; and he, perhaps, seeing her efforts to charm, solely directed to himself, artlessly mistook it for a very different aim than that of vanity—the desire of reigning in one self-devoted heart; and equally flattered and enchanted, must so have precipitated himself into an engagement which might cause the misery of his life.

With amiable ingenuousness, Agatha confessed that when she heard on the night of Ippolita's first appearance at Santa Barbara, the name of her companion, heard that he had gone without more than a friendly enquiry after her, her jealous fears changed their object, (for O how quickly is the attached heart alarmed!) and fixed upon the fair stranger so interestingly found, and so actively assisted. This circumstance made her at first speak of Baron Wernheim in so

distant a way, that Ippolita was left unrestrained in her observations upon his character, and her expressions of gratitude for his services. These observations, impartial, and therefore inadequate to the feelings with which her auditor regarded him, had at once convinced Agatha that she was mistaken; after which, the indulgence of an affection for Ippolita became delightful in itself, and yet more so for the sake of Wernheim, with whom regard for the same object seemed yet to connect her.

When Agatha repeated this, she added with a deep sigh, which contradicted part of what she said, that now, all her folly was over; she should henceforth think of Baron Wernheim only as an object of grateful respect; for the Prioress had kindly told her he was actually engaged to her beautiful rival; and had coupled this information not with harsh reproof, like Sister Clara, and barbarous disclosure,

but with maternal admonitions, and reasonable displeasure.

Gently to wean this poor girl from an attachment so vain and imprudent, yet seemingly so deeply rooted, Ippolita often relinquished her own most anxious or sweetest reveries, to talk with her upon subjects calculated to strengthen her mind, and interest her heart: — any subject, in short, which might turn Agatha's thoughts from the one forbidden by delicacy and reason.

Ippolita's kindness certainly took effect, for Agatha appeared less listless and dejected after awhile, accustomed herself, whenever she spoke of the Baron, to do it without reference to the past, and betook herself to alternate earnest study and useful exercise.

With a companion so minded, and with such a humble friend as Renati ever within reach, Ippolita's own peculiar anxieties were cheerfully borne; and weeks passed, stealing on to months.

Neither from Valombrosa nor her uncle Giuliano could she expect to hear, until they returned to Italy. Meanwhile she heard occasionally from Baron Wernheim, and her uncle the Cardinal; and the news she obtained from them was of a happier complexion than heretofore.

Though an expedition against Genoa (one of the French alliances) had failed, the Venetians had recovered Vicenza, and the Pope acquired Modena: he had also succeeded in detaching from the Florentines Marco Colonna, a young General whose fame bade fair to rival that of Gaston de Foix himself; and by granting the investiture of the kingdom of Naples to Ferdinand of Arragon, His Holiness had secured the arms and heart of that Monarch.

Thus, then, the scale of France was somewhat depressed; and Ippolita hoped, therefore, that if her uncle were successful in his two missions to Switzerland

and England, it might sink at once and for ever.

But interesting as these views were to her, they were chiefly so, from their probable effect upon her destiny with Valombrosa; and sometimes she chilled with the apprehension that if unfortunate circumstances rendered it necessary for him to choose between her and the desertion of Soderini, his inflexible principles would determine against her. This, however, could only be in the event of her family's restoration to their full power in Florence by force of arms: she wished, and therefore tried to think, that all they should ever reach, would be their re-admission into the rank of private citizens, and the recovery of their patrimonial estates.

When Ippolita parted from Prince Angelo Rossano, he had calculated that it would require above two months, from that period, ere he and his friends could reach the Island of Rhodes; and as

Valombrosa had assured him that his business there would be concluded in one interview with the person he sought, and that if happily ended, he would be too eager to revisit his country, for any after delay, it was to be expected that their return would be immediate. Ippolita therefore ventured mentally to fix that period towards the end of the summer.

From her uncle Giuliano she had no prospect of hearing, save through the distant medium of the Cardinal; so difficult and hazardous were the communications of those days. He was gone on a wandering mission of a political nature; so that it was incumbent on him to keep his movements as much as possible beyond the reach of discovery from any power hostile to Venice and the Holy See.

It is true that the Emperor, though at war with both, and irritated at the Pontiff for having changed his political line of conduct, yet reverenced the same Pon-

tiff in his sacred character, and consequently did not deny Giuliano de Medici a safe conduct into the Tyrol to visit his niece. That act of graciousness, added to his favour towards herself, was more than Ippolita might have hoped, or could have obtained, except through the influence of Baron Wernheim. She was content, therefore, to receive only the brief letters of her uncle the Cardinal.

When the month of August was entered into, that impatient expectation, which Ippolita had been so conscientiously repressing during the three months which preceded it, burst forth incapable of further restraint; and every blast that blew, every cloud that darkened the sky, made her heart sink.

She was in this state of feeling, when a letter, under cover to the Prioress, came from Valombrosa.

The sight of his hand-writing caused her a momentary transport; but the letter was dated from Rhodes, and told her

that he was fated to remain there an indefinite period. The knight he went purposely to seek was absent, he said, on business of the order, and was not expected to resume his station in Rhodes, until the autumn. If this brother had not been employed in the visitation of various foreign commanderies, Valombrosa would have sought him at whatever place he had been stationary; but as it was, resolved not to forego his only chance of satisfaction on a point wherein he confessed the best part of his honour and happiness were bound up, he determined to await the knight's return, though at the loss of so many months of that happiness which he fondly trusted awaited him in Europe.

This letter, though somewhat tinctured by melancholy, breathed all the fervour of grateful love, grateful for the ingenuousness with which Ippolita had assured him of her heart, and the nobleness with which she had trusted her peace and duty

in his hands, when she left to him the power of making her terms with the Florentines. It gave her delightful assurances of Rosalia's increasing health, and happy feelings, and cheered her by a better description of his own.

Valombrosa spoke of Rossano with the warmest affection; and while he stiled him the brother of his soul, adverted to the hope of one day calling him so in fact.

Of Baron Wernheim, he wrote with peculiar interest, regretting that hitherto they had severally contented themselves with knowing each other by reputation. He blamed himself for this, acknowledging that the dry stile and mere business-like subjects of the few letters Wernheim had heretofore addressed to him, had disgusted his quicker fancy and fastidious taste; and that satisfied with hearing his cousin praised as a gallant soldier and honourable man, he had never sought an opportunity of discovering that fund of

noble and delicate sentiments which Wernheim developed in his conduct, and which many who possess, rarely display, except in domestic privacy.

He added his own determination, if circumstances did not occur to render all foreign associations hateful to him, to cultivate his cousin's friendship with sincere assiduity.

Perhaps in no part of this long letter did Ippolita more immediately recognise the Valombrosa she loved, than in what related to the subject just mentioned. There spoke that ingenuous spirit of self-condemning justice which was ever so beautiful in her eyes — that spirit which so often diffused over the features of Valombrosa, and imparted to his voice a charm, even beyond those already there!

Strange to say, she remembered these moments, as those in which Valombrosa appeared to her most dignified as well as

most amiable; she felt that they had ever made him most dear!

From dwelling upon his present manly avowal of former prejudice, her thoughts naturally wandered over past incidents of a similar nature: thence to other parts of his conduct: and the survey made her feel with joy, that his character had developed and improved in every point susceptible of alteration.

Those gusts of passion which had sometimes shocked her in description, when she was first an inmate with him, had gradually abated in violence and frequency, and she fancied would yield completely to the strength of better influences.

His repentance of former hasty judgments, had certainly made him less quick in forming them now, and more forward in confessing them. Thus, in that point also his character was ennobled. In short he seemed to her like the summer sun, which, rising among a few wandering

vapours, is yet destined to ascend in brightness to a cloudless meridian.

But there was one cloud, she thought, which might extinguish that beneficent light and warmth for ever. At least so his first letter had warned her. To that fear her reflections turned with agonizing enquiry.

What was the evil he dreaded? she asked herself. Who was he gone to seek at Rhodes?—Could it be the person she had first seen on the evening of the Fast of St. Magdalen? or was that wretch only an agent of one in Rhodes? That these persons were either one and the same, or closely connected with each other, she scarcely doubted; but what their joint or separate power was, over Valombrosa's fate, she knew not to imagine.

With what cold shudderings did she not recall the looks and words of that mysterious visitor! She could balance their powerful effect, only by repeating again and again, the impassioned language

of Valombrosa on the sad night she was torn *from* him; thrilling her mournful heart by a recollection of all those penetrating tones in which his heart spoke conviction to her's.

To another and another month she must now look even for the chance of hearing those tones in reality again: and struggling against the weak desire of indulging the grief this disappointment caused her, she resolutely smothered every sigh, stilled every rebellious pulse, and resumed with a tranquil exterior, yet often-tortured mind, her occupations with the nuns.

Equal as Ippolita's appearance seemed to these devout sisters, Agatha's truest sympathy instantly perceived the slight change that might be detected in it. She had early remarked in Ippolita, whenever a melancholy subject was discussed, a greater depression of her beautifully-traced brow, and a more languid dropping of her long shading eye-lashes,

than was the usual habit of her countenance; and now when these signs became almost stationary, Agatha guessed that some painful disappointment wholly occupied her. Without giving breath to her observations, the amiable girl only redoubled her efforts at interesting and pleasing her; and if she could not amuse away a sorrowful feeling, she invariably awakened a pleasurable one — the gratifying sense of intended kindness.

Renati was in Friuli, whither he had volunteered a journey to visit Baron Wernheim; for that gallant soldier was then in that province, endeavouring to check the incursions of the irritated Venetians. Ippolita had sent Renati there, anxious to learn the real state of a contusion which Wernheim had lately received, (so report said,) in the humane attempt to save some property of a peasant whose house had been set on fire by the enemy. She desired this information for her own satisfaction, and she desired

it for that of Agatha, who in spite of all her efforts at dismissing the wish with the hope of being any thing to Wernheim, was relapsing again into her former absorbing interest in his fortunes.

That unlucky hurt had given the Baron fresh claims of admiration and compassion upon her heart; and that heart, too ready to seize any excuse for re-admitting his image, was now evidently magnifying his contusion into a dangerous wound.

The absence of Renati was a pain the more to Ippolita, at this period; his return, a week or two afterwards, a real pleasure. He brought an account calculated to raise her hopes for her own family, but to distress her for the safety of her friend. The arms of Venice were successful in Friuli, and Baron Wernheim obliged to retreat before them, from the inadequate strength of the forces under his command. His hurt had been severe, but not alarming; and Renati

brought one piece of intelligence highly gratifying to Agatha; it was, that the body of German horse to which her father belonged, was on its march to join the troops of Wernheim, and that the Baron had commissioned Renati to tell her, that he would not fail to moderate the veteran's ardour, when it might otherwise carry him too far, by reminding him that he had a daughter to live for.

It was scarcely possible to say why this intelligence should act like a charm upon the languishing spirits of Agatha; but it had some secret power either to soothe her disappointment, or to revive her hopes: and Ippolita was agreeably surprised by seeing those melancholy dark eyes sparkling with an animation she had never observed in them before. She even fancied that Agatha was not always as desponding as she professed, nay indeed believed herself: a phrase now and then dropt from her, which showed she thought it just possible that even Baron

Wernheim might fail to attach for any time the fickle beauty whose chains bound him. This was a dangerous expectation, and if realised might still have no happy effect upon Agatha's destiny: Ippolita, therefore, though fervently wishing it might, for both their sakes, sought to detach her from nourishing it too fondly.

It was well that Ippolita had no longer the task of watching her young companion's melancholy moods; for autumn began; her uncle Giuliano returned not; and she was left to vibrate between fear and expectation with regard to her friends at Rhodes, to fancy all the possible accidents of an intricate navigation, at a late season.

As she mused at night in her solitary chamber, her eyes fixed on the sky, sometimes spangled with stars, but oftener crossed by stormy clouds, and heard the fierce winds scattering the courts below with showers of leaves, every blast seemed to pass through her heart. She thought

of Valombrosa and Rosalia, and fancied she saw them in the midst of a shoreless sea, in a solitary ship, driving before the resistless wind, through dark and mountainous waves. One heavier swell of those fearful waves, she thought, might overwhelm them; one instant's carelessness, or one instant's accident, might send them to the bottom of that dreadful ocean! — Image of horror! who can bear to let their fancy dwell on it, when those they love are exposed to such dangers? In such a situation there would be no help for them from human power; and Ippolita felt that from such thoughts, also, there was no defence for her, except prayer and faith.

To these she fled, ere apprehension amounted to agony: and fortifying her soul by higher considerations than those of mere reason, she was enabled to preserve much of that self-direction, which had so long distinguished her from other women.

She was watching the last leaves fall-

ing from a single sycamore in the cloister-court of Santa Barbara, when a letter was brought her from her uncle the Cardinal. It informed her that her uncle Giuliano had succeeded in his mission to England, and was going thence into Spain on a business of conclusive importance.

This letter was shortly followed by one from Valombrosa, dated Florence. He wrote in a tone of manly confidence, and with a cheerfulness which gave the best assurance that he was returned, as he described, in perfect health, and renovated spirit.

" I have seen the person I sought, I have obtained the satisfaction I sought; (these were his words,) and with the liveliest gratitude I feel that this interview has removed its heaviest load from my heart. O my Ippolita, when I shall tell you what that frightful oppression was — you will not say that I felt it with distempered sensibility. Possible dishonour

has haunted me day and night, for a period which seemed endless; — I saw no refuge from it, but the grave or the cloister; and had not the cruel dread which has so long eat into my soul, been blessedly dispersed, never would you have seen Valombrosa again. — So long the most wretched of men, ah! let me now strive to render myself the happiest, and accelerate the day in which I may repose the secret of so many dismal months in the bosom of my wife."

After this adjuration, he proceeded to inform her, that he was immediately going to make his suite to the Gonfaloniere, and other public functionaries, to grant him the privilege which they had permitted to Strozzi; that of allying himself to a Medici: and assuring her that their friend Rossano would have been the bearer of the present dispatch, but for his wish of remaining near Rosalia during her brother's absence, when that brother should fly to Germany with the intelli-

gence of his own happiness. Valombrosa ended his letter with every blessing which an almost-happy and entirely-devoted heart could wish heaped upon the object of its love.

The joy of knowing him safe, and that yet-greater one of believing him restored to peace of mind, together with the near prospect of their obtaining permission to unite their fates, was more than Ippolita could support. She wept with uncontrolled emotions of gratitude and rapture; at every burst of her joyful tears, at every throb of her grateful heart still feeling that she never could be grateful enough to the Divine Bestower of so much happiness and so many hopes.

The weeks, the days she had now to count, though tinctured with deep anxiety, were yet so fraught with gladdening anticipations that she felt they would no longer seem wearisome. She could fill the solitude of her retired hours by the images of her dearest friends glow-

ing again in health, and expectant of happiness; she might dare to fancy a future stretch of sunny life, with all those beloved objects to enjoy it with her; and she might hope at last to give free way to those warm affections which had so long been checked and disciplined by the severity of her destiny, and the rectitude of her own principles.

Ippolita therefore was almost happy even now: and the glow of her bosom communicating itself to that of the susceptible and already-animated Agatha, threw so bright a light over every object they saw or talked of together, that even the sterile skies of November, their gloom, and their cold, weakened not for them the attractions of nature.

They now daily rambled out together, or alone, inhaling health with the keenly-penetrating air, and admiring the lofty summits of the Brenner, glittering with ices and snows above the clouds, like the battlements of heaven.

There was one romantic spot, just where the valley issued into the more open country, whence the finest view of that majestic chain of mountains was to be caught. It opened upon them from deep masses of pine woods and fractured cliffs, whence proceeded a warm spring celebrated for the medicinal effect of its consecrated waters, and known by the name of Santa Barbara's Well.

The well itself was but a basin of granite, hollowed out and polished by the flow of the water into the smoothness of marble. It was partly hid by overhanging rocks above, and by a profusion of shrubs which grew wild round it: but these rocks afforded so cool a shade to it in summer, and the evergreens formed so sheltering a screen to it in winter, that both were suffered to remain without alteration; and resting places only were here and there scooped out in the rock for the use of pilgrims resorting there.

This was a favourite haunt of Ippolita's,

who used to seek it in summer for its shade, and in winter to observe the effects of moon-light upon its romantic mixture of frostwork, with the lively verdure, and brilliant berries of its evergreens.

Towards this spot, one evening she wandered alone; for her thoughts were too disturbed for any society: she was invited by a sky of more than usual beauty; and a restless state of mind made action necessary to her.

Week had succeeded to week since the arrival of Valombrosa's animating letter, yet no other had followed it: no friend had appeared to tell her whether his hopes were crushed or crowned.

It was impossible for even the hardiest nature wholly to resist the saddening impression of such a circumstance; and painfully altered in spirits, she stole from the presence of Agatha, and walked slowly down the valley.

When she came within sight of the sainted spring, the bright light of its

transparent water, and of the numerous icicles which fringed as with diamonds, the pendant ivies surrounding it, was beautifully contrasted by the deep shadows from the rocks and trees. The moon was yet young, and as Ippolita advanced, gazing on her clear cold crescent, a sudden meteor, like a bright arrow loosed from that silver bow, shot along the sky, and seemed to drop into the waters of the well.

Its streaming light quivered for that instant upon two figures now in the act of advancing to the granite basin. The one seemed old and decrepid, the other young and active. She marked the languid air of the first, and the hasty movements of the other, with that interest she had learned from the Sisters of Mercy to feel for every wayfaring stranger; and she hastened forward to offer them the shelter of the convent if necessary.

Just as she came close to the aged woman, who had seated herself on a stone,

the young man was holding the cup left for that purpose, to the mouth of the spring, the surface of the well being frozen. He was stooping forward intent on his office, though doing it hastily, and his face was therefore turned from her; but there was something in his air which made her heart beat. A bountiful nature will show itself even in the giving of a cup of cold water. The person she eyed so earnestly, filled the vessel to overflowing, and turning after he had given it to the object of his charity, beheld Ippolita; he staggered back, while she, exclaiming "Valombrosa!" sunk, overpowered with joyful surprise, upon his breast.

For many minutes he held her there in silence; no rapturous pressure making her heart feel the bounding of his; — no transports bursting from his lips; — not even a whispered breath thrilling her fast-changing cheek!

At length he clasped her to him with a

convulsive action; then uttering a fearful sigh, released her from his arms.

Ippolita at once comprehended as she thought, her misfortune: and pale and speechless as himself, she sank down upon one of the rocky seats.

Valombrosa glanced at his chance companion, and said in a hurrying voice, "This poor woman is a pilgrim to this well, she tells me, — a stranger here, — would not your convent give her shelter?"

Ippolita answered mechanically in the affirmative, but remained with a wandering look, still motionless. She was not prepared for such a scene as this; Valombrosa was; and he had to repeat what he had said, anxious to remove a third person, ere she quite comprehended him.

Rallying herself, thèn, for the sake of that humanity which no selfish cares ever seemed to render less lively in Valombrosa's breast, she assured the pilgrim of

a welcome at Santa Barbara, explained to her the easy way which conducted to it, and assisting her down the only piece of rocky path, returned to the spot where she had left Valombrosa.

She found him standing with his arms folded, under the deep ivies of the cliff. The faint moonlight was on him; and it showed his pale features marked with despair, but not distraction. He raised his head as she approached, and fixed his eyes on her with a piercing expression of sorrow and of tenderness.

She stood trembling and suspended: he did not remove his eyes, till the glazing tears gradually overspread, and finally blinded his sight: then he turned them away, with a sigh like the last he was ever to draw.

"Valombrosa!" she cried, laying her cold hand on his arm, and her voice extinguishing at every word, "what a meeting is this!"

"What a meeting!"—and Valom-

brosa, as he repeated her exclamation, buried his face in his hands: his whole body shook while he remained thus. Suddenly he clasped her a second time in his arms, and melting precipitately into tears, wept with her.

They sat down together under the rocks. Ippolita made a faint effort to disengage herself from the arms which still held her, while she said gaspingly, "I think I understand the meaning of this meeting, Valombrosa — we must part; — I was not born to be so happy!" The tears dried in her eyes as she spoke, and she tried to smile; but a deathly coldness evidently crept through her veins, turning her lips like ashes.

Valombrosa gazed at her again in stupified silence; his countenance gradually clouding over till it assumed the blackness of despair. "Yes, Ippolita!" he cried, in an altered voice, "you say true — we must part: I come to release you from the vow made to a more fortunate

man. 'Tis no longer the rich, the courted, the honoured Marquis of Valombrosa that you see, but Orlando Valori, to whom a base faction, and a prejudiced judge, have left nothing but that name and an unsullied conscience. — Ippolita, they have exiled me."

"For me, then!" interrupted Ippolita, with a thrilling cry, "O Valombrosa, can I live and hear this?" — and, as if about to die, she threw herself on the ground at his feet.

Valombrosa raised her: "Do not unman me!" he said, with quivering lips, "Oh Ippolita, I need your support. Accuse not yourself for this; rather I should say, accuse not that love which is now the sole life-spring of this wretched heart. I was but suspected, from my love for you, of the foul crime for which I am unjustly banished, — condemned on other evidence. Could I, or would I have given up a fair fame which I was bound to protect, by declaring the

nature of my connection with a man who was known to have had a share in the conspiracy against Soderini's life, then might I have cleared myself, — then might I have retained my rank, my fortune, and my country, — then might I have lived with my own personal honour untarnished, but!" he vehemently added, interrupting himself, and striking his forehead, "each way was destruction!"

His look, his tone, reminded Ippolita of the tones she had heard from him, and the looks she had fancied, in the fearful scene of the Banquetting House; and iced with the thought, she laid her hand upon his arm as if to check his violence. Valombrosa understood its tremulous grasp: he recollected himself; bending his lips to that hand, he rested his head there for some instants. When he raised his brow, it was no longer black and threatening.

"Even thus," he exclaimed, resuming that air of nobleness which distinguished

him, "I will not call my honour tarnished! this heart acquits me — henceforth let it be the voice of the whole world to me! — rather would I live so self-respected, an outcast from all mankind, than preserve the pomp and privileges of my former station, with one secret doubt that it ought not to be mine."

Unconscious of what he did, and evidently seized by some other powerful passion, Valombrosa started away, and took several agitated steps to and fro.

Meanwhile Ippolita stood with her hands locked together, and her eyes earnestly following his perturbed movements. What crowds of maddening recollections and regrets passed through her mind, like storm-clouds hurrying across a winter sky! Was it thus they met after more than a year's separation? Was this the end of all those hopes with which she had been flattered? Was she beholding him for the last time, whom at this moment she saw with more exquisite

feelings of admiration and tenderness than she fancied she had ever done before? Was that renewed health and vigour which she beheld again in the perfect form before her, to be blighted afresh by calamity? And that face where every sensibility spoke from features cast in the only mould that ever was manly beauty to her, was that face to be altered by want, and care, and contumelies, as she had seen her father's? Alas! was exile to be always the fate of those she loved?

As these thoughts reached their climax, swelled by a rush of sad remembrances, her fortitude entirely gave way, and she burst a second time into a passion of tears.

Valombrosa turned at the sounds of her weeping; her excess of sorrow, by displaying the extent of her affection for him, gave a softness to his feelings, which mixing melancholy with them, happily moderated their violence. He

looked at her, as a parent eyes a dear and suffering child. "Ippolita!" he murmured, "if my fondest hopes are crushed, they have yet been so crushed that I shall no longer feel the hateful war within me, between my love for you, my natural yearning towards those belonging to you, and what I believed my duty to my government, and my obligation to Soderini. The secrecy and chicanery with which my trial has been conducted, and the unjust sentence passed on me without proof, on the oath of a practised villain! Soderini's cruel or timorous conduct, have loosed me from all bond to regard him as my friend: my conscience, then, is free! And if I have lost the outward marks of my birth-right, — if I seem disgraced and despoiled at this moment, yet not for many racking months have I felt more blessedly conscious that I am — that I was — but of that no more. They fancied they disgraced me; and my

sentence was my triumph! I might have quitted Florence over its citizens' breasts; their cries, their blessings yet thrill in my ear. Oh, man is not ungrateful! — it was a moment, Ippolita, too dearly bought, alas, but a moment worth ages of common life!"

The sparkling fire of his eyes, as he pronounced the last words, suspended the tears in Ippolita's: she gazed on him with a heart aching with love. "Oh they will recall thee, Valombrosa!" she exclaimed fervently, "and if I may know thee restored to power and honour, I can bless heaven, and die here." The sigh which burst from her as she spoke, terminated the transient exaltation of Valombrosa. "Ippolita!" he exclaimed, looking at her with eyes in which his whole soul was painted, "that tone, that look, enfeebles my worthiest purpose. Tempt me not to base, unmanly selfishness! Ought I to take advantage of the tenderness which almost woos me by

its generous evidence, to do so, and ask you still to think of me with love?

"In my days of glory, you hid this tenderness from my eyes, — those days when had I dared to think myself thus dear, I would have rushed on ruin to have secured it. — Now, when I come to you a beggar, — an outcast, — an exile, — my fame tarnished, — my youth blighted, — you look at me, — you speak to me Ippolita, as if — Oh do not, do not look so still!"

Valombrosa pressed down his disordered eyes with the hand he tore out of her's, and moved some paces from her. Ippolita softly followed him.

"Let me understand you Valombrosa!" she said, resuming courage with the ideas his manner excited. "What meant this visit? — Your first obscure expressions left me to suppose that the request you made at Florence in my behalf had been simply denied; and in that case, I was prepared to yield you up

to higher duties; — the commands of your country, and the claims of your kindred: then no look or word of mine should have unveiled to you the agony here! — but it is not so: duty no longer opposes itself between us: mine, to my father's friends, is blessedly acquitted at last; I am the same portionless, proscribed Ippolita de Medici that you first loved, — and you — Oh Valombrosa! what misfortune can do aught than make you dearer to me? — Give me a right to do so, and I go with you through the world."

A smile brightened her showering eyes, as she raised them with a soft blush to Valombrosa. He turned towards her, and would have caught her again in his arms; but conquering the dangerous impulse, he only seized her offered hand and carried it to his burning lips.

"Matchless, matchless creature!" he cried, "I must not covet greater happiness than this!" — he paused and fixed

his dissolving eyes on her : — then resuming in a broken voice — " Were it but for ourselves we had to choose ! — poverty, wandering, all the evils of exile, we might encounter for each other, and with each other : — but there are other considerations. — We might not always suffer alone, my Ippolita — and our innocent" — the word that would have followed, was suffocated in the painful agitation with which he spoke.

Confused and convinced, all blushing and palpitating, Ippolita drew her hand from his, without speaking : — their eyes ventured not to encounter ; but Valombrosa felt the whole of what that silent action expressed. He sighed profoundly : — sighed again and again, and sunk into a silence as deep and mournful as her own.

He was first roused from his meditations, by observing that Ippolita was shivering extremely, though less from

the effect of the intense cold, than from inward agitation.

"If I might be admitted at Santa Barbara," he said hastily, "I should pray you to return thither. I have inadvertently exposed you to this severe night too long already: yet, I have so much more to say!"

Ippolita, not calm enough for articulate reply, bowed her head with a miserable smile, and drawing her cloke round her, preceded him down the slippery steps which led from the well.

CHAPTER XXVI.

In the parlour of the convent, Valombrosa endeavoured to give Ippolita a distinct account of those circumstances which, during the first anguish of meeting, he expressed only in bursts of incoherent grief.

The cause of his chief mental suffering at *Il bel Deserto*, he alluded to without fully explaining; reluctant still to breathe, even to her, the whole of a secret which had been so fatal to himself: what he did tell, was sufficiently painful.

"It was on the night of the Fast of St. Magdalen," he said, "when my heart was all tremulous with emotions as delightful, if not as permanent, as real happiness, that you may remember I was

called to meet a stranger in my library. I went, and found the wretch you know by sight.—His business was soon spoken: it was to tell me a secret too horrible for me to repeat—a secret useless to you to know—one that I would willingly wash out from memory, with all my life's blood! Of this horrible secret he produced damning evidence; and boldly acknowledging that a youth of dissolute expense rendered him desperate, he offered to conceal the secret, provided I would give him an order on the Bank of Florence for a sum of money adequate to the liquidation of his debts.

I started from the proposal; with violence I fear: indignant at the wretch who could thus make his profit of a guiltless man's misery — nay of his best feelings!—I was violent in vain. The miscreant's silence was to be bought at any price,—and I bought it!"

Ippolita recollected what Marco had told her of the person who carried

Valombrosa's order on the bank, and remembering the humiliating doubts which that circumstance had awakened in her, she could not help exclaiming, " Oh how we misjudged you!"

Valombrosa understood her, and replied by a sickly smile: he sighed as he resumed. " When this demand was granted, I thought my bitter moment over; but the bitterest was to come. With the malignant look of a fiend, with a laugh — yes, by my soul, a laugh of brutal derision, he told me that there was still another secret in his possession, which I must bid high to secure: one that placed my name, my honour, my whole fortune at his mercy. In short, he would have persuaded me that I had no right to any thing I enjoyed — that I was — withered be the lips which uttered the pernicious falsehood, and the heart that forged it!"

" Valombrosa!" interrupted Ippolita, in a tone of horror, shuddering at the

deadly imprecation. Valombrosa's violence was checked instantly: his face crimsoned, and he stammered as he replied, " Forgive the intemperate anger of a son, recalling the foul aspersion cast upon his mother! Yes, Ippolita," he added, seeing her start back, " this monster came to tell me that I was not the son of the Marquis Valombrosa; that I owed my birth to a lover whom I had indeed heard my mother was weakly induced to give up at the commands of her parents, and that consequently, if he published the tale, I must yield my rank and patrimony to my cousin Ercole Valori."

" You could not believe him, Valombrosa?" asked Ippolita, all the fire of woman's virtue, kindling in her eyes for another.

" I did not," was his reply. " I was transported to such frenzy at the foul assertion, that had not my weapon resisted this shaking hand when I tried

to draw it on him, he must have gone that moment to answer for his crimes to the God on whose name he iniquitously called. — But it was not so ordained. At that instant he took from his breast a letter written by my mother, which he challenged me to read ere I attacked him, and couple its contents with what he had unfolded to me at the commencement of our interview.

" The sight of this letter changed the nature of my passion — I read it again and again, Ippolita. It was written in faded ink. The characters were her's in very deed; the style of folding and of sealing; the impress of a ring was on it which I never remembered to have seen her finger without: it was addressed to Count Albert Stolzenau, the lover of her youth: and it breathed the soul of love. — There was one sentence in it which shook my firmest confidence: well do I remember it, for how often afterwards did I not

repeat it to myself with racking perplexity! 'twas this.

" 'He that you speak of, is indeed master of this poor dependent person — but even he cannot command my heart. And after all, Albert, I shall not think myself guilty of an unpardonable crime, if I contrive to see you sometimes in Ursula's apartment. Let the guilt rest on them who encouraged the attachment of two hearts they afterwards rent asunder.'

" While I dwelt on this fearful passage, Magliano, for that is the wretch's name, was heaping on my stunned sense his own comments: pointing every word with hellish eagerness; drawing startling testimonies from the first tale he told me: assuring me that he possessed a whole packet of such letters as the one I held; and repeating that they contained evidence enough, if not for proof sufficient to dispossess me of my fortune in a court

of law, yet more than sufficient to blot my honour in men's minds, with a mother's infamy.

" At that image, Ippolita, at the bare possibility of such disgrace, I confess I was ready to yield all I possessed to buy the killing documents. 'Twas not wealth, nor title I would so have kept, but our family honour, and my poor sister's unwounded peace. To think of her tender heart receiving such a stab ! — her feeble frame sustaining such a shock ! How could I imagine that she would have survived it ?

" In the tumult of my amazed soul, I madly uttered this ; and Magliano seized the advantage it gave him over me. You may comprehend what an advantage that was. Suffice it, he offered me the possession of my mother's letters at the price of a property in Romagna, by which he said he should be enabled to marry and live honestly for the remainder of his life. My whole soul was

up in arms: I knew not what to decide on. And when he offered me time for consideration, if I would pay his quiescence during that time with a jewel of value, I closed with the proposal, and regulating a secret mode of communication with him, dismissed him from my presence.

"In this state of mind, overwhelmed with a weight of horrid discoveries, distracted between the wish of burying a mother's shame in my own breast, and the desire of doing justice to my cousin as the rightful heir, if I were not so,—groaning under the certainty of another dreadful story told by the same lips; I was rushing to the solitude of my chamber, when I was stayed by you. Ippolita, wonder not that I fell a lifeless corse at your feet!—Wonder not that I revived to feelings wilder and worse than insanity!—Wonder not that after all, I lay in Florence for days and nights in a delirium which almost rendered Calvesi

master of the horrid tale I had so lately learned!"

"Oh, Valombrosa! I wonder only that you lived!" exclaimed Ippolita, scarcely able to articulate, and pressing his burning hand.

Valombrosa's already-relieved heart spoke in the touching and tender smile he bestowed on her as he returned the pitying pressure. "My visit to Florence," he resumed, "was to ask one of the female servants there who had lived with my parents at the time of my birth, some questions respecting it; and her answers confirmed one part of Magliano's assertions — that I had come into the world before the customary time. I was in fact born at seven months: this information seemed to seal the story.

"When I recovered from the fever into which it threw me, you know in what a temper of mind I returned to *Il bel Deserto*. I believed that every thing for me was over in this life: — Love and

my Ippolita, — Home and Rosalia, every blissful vision was passing away from my amazed eyes; passing like the opening heavens before a condemned spirit: as hopeless; as unattainable!

"Gloom and despair succeeded to former distraction: for at length I resolved, if hereafter convinced of my mother's guilt and my own illegitimacy, to make restitution to my cousin Ercole. By retiring into a monastery, I might preserve the honour of our family unstained, yet give up to the rightful heir what I had hitherto withheld in ignorance of his better claim.

"In this resolution I met Magliano on the night you overheard us in the Banquetting-House: and with the promise of yielding him those lands in Romagna, I obtained the important papers.

"And they!" ejaculated Ippolita, hanging breathless on his looks, — "And they, dearest part of my soul," exclaimed

Valombrosa, regarding her with mournful pleasure, "they testified in my poor mother's favour. There was not one which could evidence guilt, to any but a depraved mind incapable of understanding a virtuous attachment; nay, there were expressions in them so honourable to womanly delicacy, that I could not help conceiving an idea at last, that they must have been written before, not after her marriage; that the person she alluded to without naming, as one authorised to regulate her conduct, was her father, not her husband. In short their internal evidence was convincing: but with renewed respect and affection for this unfortunate mother, came deeper sorrow. Other circumstances which I must not dwell on, brought keener regrets with worthier convictions; and I had still to ward off from Rosalia the knowledge of them.

"I know not, Ippolita, whether I was not wrong in this. Since I have seen

what Rosalia *has* borne, I begin to think it would have been better had I dared the danger of her knowing all I know: for into what grievous straits have I not been driven by the fear of that danger! It kept me in bondage to a villain, — a mean, malignant coward, that resented not like a man, the violent expressions of my transient frenzies, but repaid himself afterwards by goading me to fresh fits of fury. He saw that I rated family honour higher than life, and rated my sister's peace yet higher, if that were possible: he knew that a whisper from him could annihilate both; and ever threatening, ever demanding, he played with my tortured soul like an angler with his struggling victim. It was bondage insupportable, and you must scorn me for having submitted to it."

"Valombrosa!" said Ippolita, as he stopt pale and exhausted with remembered agony, "I know not the extent of your reasons for this sad sub-

jection to the wretch you speak of; but if they may not have been all your cooler judgment sanctions, they have honoured your heart. And when I think of your submitting to the torments of continual apprehension, for the sake of a mother's fame, and a sister's life, how can I ask myself whether you did wisely?"

"Oh, I was wrong; I was wrong, my Ippolita," he repeated; "and I felt that I was so, too late. When my feet were entangled in the net I had allowed to wind round them, then I felt, that by shrinking from the encounter of one certain evil, I had rushed into countless others."

"Ever the best, and noblest! even in thine errors, Valombrosa!" involuntarily exclaimed Ippolita, in a transport of tender admiration. Valombrosa bowed his crimsoned face to the fond address; and after an expressive pause, returned to his narrative.

"Nearly satisfied of my mother's innocence, and possessed of all the alleged

proofs of her supposed guilt, I still sought to get out of Magliano's hands a single paper which substantiated the only true part of his detestable disclosure; a part I must not dwell on even to you, since it has been proved to me on other evidence besides his. I bought it at last, at a fearful price, on the day you may remember his crossing our path at *Il bel Deserto*, when Soderini's nephew was present!" Ippolita remembered the day well. "That document obtained, I had no more to wish, but perfect satisfaction on the subject of my mother's conduct, otherwise every ducat I expended or bestowed was robbery from my cousin. I determined, therefore, to find out Count Albert Stolzenau; and for this purpose applied myself secretly to discover whether he lived, and where. In the midst of these enquiries, long fruitless, you were torn from me by the ruffian hand of Guidobaldo Alviano. I confess that when, after my illness, I recovered sense

to comprehend the loss I had sustained, every former grief sunk into temporary littleness: for though I gained intelligence of Stolzenau's residence, it was not till I knew you safe, that I could determine on quitting Italy. You must guess that it was him I went to seek at Rhodes."

"And you saw him?" asked Ippolita, in a tone of deep interest. "How powerfully the meeting must have affected you!"

"It did, indeed, my Ippolita," he replied; "for, though I saw in him a man who had survived the ill-starred affection which hurried him into the profession of religious vows, I saw in him one from whom the impression of a severe disappointment was not effaced: it tinctured his looks and words with sadness, even while he spoke calmly of my mother."

"But how met you?" enquired Ippolita. "Was he not much moved when he saw the son of the woman he had loved?

when he heard of what she had been accused?"

"He was moved then exceedingly," replied Valombrosa; "and I saw the tears frequently cloud his eyes while looking over her letters. But he talked of her, and of his passion as of the dream of fevered youth; and confessed that there came a time when he felt his disappointment less acutely, and repented the hasty step he had taken."

"All hearts would not so survive their affections!" said Ippolita sadly, feeling her own heart sick at the possibility of being hereafter as calmly remembered by Valombrosa. He guessed her thoughts, and fervently pressing her hand to his lips, while directing on her the full expression of his most speaking eyes, said in an energetic tone, "If my mother had only renounced him at her father's command, not married another, Stolzenau might have cherished her idea with romantic and delightful constancy: but

her own act opposed the sense of duty to such indulgence, and proved that she loved him less, than she feared unjust reproaches. We love always, Ippolita, only when we are conscious of being so beloved in return."

"Then always — always do you love, Valombrosa," Ippolita could have said, for the words were in her heart; but giving him only a glance of her just-lifted and thrilling eye, she resumed the attitude of attention.

"My mother's letters," Valombrosa continued, "were, as I had supposed, part of her correspondence with Stolzenau before her marriage, when her father, with my richer father's proposals in view, revoked the encouragement he had given to the young Count's addresses. All her letters had been returned to my mother shortly after my birth, when he formed the hasty resolution of becoming a Knight of Rhodes, and but a few of these (such

of course as suited Magliano's purpose) were now shown him by me.

"Stolzenau explained to me every doubtful passage in these letters, assigning to each its proper date, and so substantiating his assertion (of which he gave other proof), that he had not seen my mother for some months previous to her marriage. Thus nothing but the most resolved scepticism could have continued dubious of my own legitimate right to the title and estates of Valombrosa.

"These assertions he sealed with the most solemn act of our religion in the church of the order at midnight, with no other witness of the awful ceremony than I that received, and the Holy Father that administered, the oath.

"From that moment I was a new creature. Satisfied that if ever my mother's fair fame were called into question, I knew where to call upon the best witness in her favour, I felt no longer in slavery to

Magliano; and I returned to Florence, vainly expectant of future happiness."

The gleams of bright expression which had crossed Valombrosa's countenance continually during this recital, increasing in brightness and frequency as he drew towards that part which freed his mother's character from reproach, now entirely vanished; darkness and despondence took their place: he sighed heavily in answer to one or two anxious intreaties from Ippolita, that he would not proceed in his narrative until more composed. He walked once or twice across the apartment they were in without speaking, then throwing himself again into a seat, he said gloomily,

"Why should I weary out our already-exhausted hearts by the particulars of my interview with Soderini? I found him alarmed at the progress made by the powers friendly to your family interest; and especially irritated at some vexatious intrigues of your brother Lorenzo. It

was in vain that I represented your just alienation from that brother, offering to engage for you, never to hold future converse with him in any situation or any place. Soderini was immoveable: he was at that moment suspicious of Clarice's unfair dealing with the laws under which she had consented to live; and he denied the suit which had so different an object for its aim.

"Ippolita, I was not moved to what I afterwards did, by any resentment, or any frenzy of passion" — (Ippolita turned deadly pale with apprehension of what was to follow); "but I seized the opportunity which his own discourse made me eager to seize. He had avowed his intention of adhering to the friendship of France in the present critical state of Italy, and I ventured to enter my protest as a private citizen against the consequences of that adherence. During the six months of my absence from our country, so visible had become the designs of that

ambitious power that I could no longer refuse acknowledging what hitherto had not appeared to me the fact, that the Gonfaloniere's policy was dangerous and reprehensible: and as such, I deemed it my duty to tell him I thought so. While, therefore, I repeated my resolution never to desert the government chosen by the people, nor to join the faction which would put De Medici at the head of affairs, I warned him that my obedience to himself would terminate at the moment in which he virtually transferred the power vested in him by his fellow-citizens, to his designing ally Louis XII.; for that at that moment he would as surely forfeit his station by incompetent judgment, or wilful contempt of our liberties, as ever his predecessor had done."

Ippolita threw down her suffusing eyes at this allusion to her father.

"And that if ever I was so forced to desert his party," Valombrosa continued, "it would be from principle, not passion:

for that I, even I, would not yield obedience to one of the family endeared to me for your sake, unless that individual, besides my own personal esteem, held his authority from the unanimous voice of the people. With this protest I left him."

"And I, even I," said Ippolita, repeating his words with enthusiasm, "would not wish you to act otherwise. No, Valombrosa, unless you could with a free conscience yield respect and obedience to my uncle, were he vested with the power once believed his right, never would I ask you to pay them! I would not be the happiest of women — indeed I could not be in such a case, if, to make me so, you must abandon a single friend, or desert a single principle!"

"I believe you, Ippolita," returned Valombrosa ardently, "and in that faith, for you and for myself, I retired from the Gonfaloniere's presence. That very night the villain Magliano sought me secretly again; and for once was

baffled by my determination to submit no longer to his base extortions. With every document in my possession relating to my father, (Valombrosa remarked not what he had said,) and convinced of my mother's innocence, I defied him to utter things of which he had now no proof — for I was chafed with what had passed between me and Soderini; and in this mood we parted. I guessed not what a serpent I had trodden on."

"But where was the dear Rosalia then?" asked Ippolita. "Where was Prince Angelo?"

"Rosalia," replied Valombrosa, "was weeping away her soft heart for my disappointment and her own: she had looked so fondly to the hour which was to restore her friend to her, and in a dearer character than ever; and it was not to come! — Rossano had fortunately been called to Bologna to meet his brother, just released with other exchanged prisoners from their long captivity in France,

and there he was, when events drove me from Florence.

"A few days after my interview with Soderini, when I was vainly endeavouring to think what course I should pursue, distracted between my wishes and my duties, a conspiracy against the life of the chief magistrate was discovered in the city, in which one of my own kinsmen was concerned, and I was arrested on suspicion of connection with him.

"Thanks to the vigilant affection of my servants, I was apprized of this arrest ere it came; and told that my friend Rossano was to be seized on the same grounds if he returned. My course, therefore, was plain. I briefly informed Rosalia that there were some popular commotions apprehended, from which I wished her removed, and confiding her to the care of the discreet Calvesi during her journey, and commending her to Rossano's protection afterwards, I sent her to a friend's at Bologna without

delay. By this step I removed her from the immediate knowledge of whatever painful events might happen to me, and I secured the safety of Rossano, who thinking solely of the charge thus committed to him, and unconscious that his name was amongst a list of suspected persons, would not therefore dream of returning to Florence to endanger his life."

"Yet you stayed!" exclaimed Ippolita.

"Would you have had me fly?" he asked, turning on her an eye, which for the first time when directed to her, flashed with momentary reproof. The glance covered her face with blushes and tears: but her blushes were not those of deserved shame. "I should not have honoured you as I do, if you had," was her mild reply, as she shook the tears from her cheek. She then pressed on him many anxious questions which he would fain have parried, but he found

her too earnest and too quick of apprehension to be lulled by any evasion.

She finally discovered that the circumstance of her having resided so long incognito under his roof; the intercourse which had afterwards been carried on with her uncle Giuliano and herself, through the medium of Prince Angelo Rossano, and the latter's visit to her at Saltzburgh, in company with her uncle, were all known and brought forward as so many presumptive proofs of Valombrosa's political intelligence with her family. His intimacy also with Count Zucharo, one unhappily implicated in that part of the conspiracy which only reached so far as Soderini's honour, and his relationship to Ercole Valori, the chief conspirator, who aimed at his life, were considered additional corroborations. But the strongest suspicion fell on him from his private interviews with Paulo Magliano, a man of infamous character,

who was known to have acted as an agent in this affair, and who had fled.

When called upon to explain the subject of his various meetings with this man, Valombrosa would not do so; he persisted in maintaining that these interviews were upon a matter of private import into which no one had authority to enquire; and he repulsed with disdain every attempt to make him explain his reasons for bestowing upon such a man the incredible sums of money proved to have been given him by his order.

Valombrosa was not intemperate upon this occasion, but he was perhaps too haughty: his spirit rose against oppression; and conscious of having struggled nobly against the virtuous affection which was now said to have subdued him to dishonour, he rested proudly upon that consciousness, and the solidity of his reputation; — forgetting that there is no reputation strong enough to withstand

unsupported, the assaults or undermining of malicious falsehood.

Hitherto all was assertion and accusation on the side of those who examined him with the wish to find him guilty: nothing was proved; and the fact of his belonging in any way to the conspiracy, was absolutely refuted by solemn oaths to the contrary, of all concerned in it. Still Valombrosa was neither acquitted nor released from the confinement into which they had thrown him; and the Gonfaloniere's suspicions were kept alive by the suggestions of his nephew, a dark and evil-minded person, who hated, because he envied Valombrosa, and was secretly in the pay of France.

Popular discontents also, increasing with the execution of some of the conspirators, and the banishment of others, heightened the Gonfaloniere's alarm, and made him more easily led into unjustifiable acts of precaution and policy. At

that critical period Magliano was discovered and arrested at a gaming table in a town of the Pisan, and conveyed to Florence: his life and liberty were promised on condition that he would make confession of his connection with the Marquis Valombrosa.

It could not be doubted that a bribe had been offered him to take the oath which declared Valombrosa one of those who had aimed at Soderini's life: that oath terminated the Gonfaloniere's indecision. Without confronting the accused with his accuser, yet half ashamed of condemning a man upon the single, unsupported testimony of a known profligate, Soderini, and the faction which composed his council, pronounced upon their victim at midnight, the sentence of banishment, and confiscation of property: and ere the morning dawned, Valombrosa was no longer in Florence.

Secret as had been the proceedings of these prejudiced judges, hasty as was his

departure, Valombrosa left the city as he had represented, amidst the cries and acclamations of its worthiest citizens.— Endeared to the people by his amiable manners, as much as by the benefits he conferred, and the amusements which, according to the customs of those days, he provided for them at stated periods, he enjoyed the solid satisfaction of being still able to think well of his kind. None were ungrateful amongst his inferiors, except such only as very tempting interests won to the tyrannical party; and amongst his equals, he was agreeably surprised to find many grieved for him in adversity, who had envied him in prosperity, or coldly receded from his gracious advances to intimacy.

Ippolita shed delicious tears while he described this scene: what different tears, when he spoke first of Rosalia!

He told her, that he joined his sister at Bologna. When there, he first detailed the circumstances of the conspiracy;

then its fatal consequences to such as had already suffered death; and lastly, by cautious degrees, informed her of his own unmerited share in what followed.

So happily had Valombrosa calculated upon Rosalia's previous horror at the untimely end of the principal persons accused, that when she heard he was banished, though unjustly, anguish for his loss of station and fortune was lost in thankfulness for the preservation of his life. Blessedly cheated by the concerted concealments of this dear brother and Prince Angelo, she lent her yielding and inexperienced mind to their kind deceit; believing in truth, what they only professed to believe, that a few brief months must see the downfall of Soderini's power, and with that would come the recall of all those suspected of opposing his ruinous policy. It was well that Rosalia saw not the looks exchanged between her brother and his friend, while she artlessly expressed a resignation too

quickly perfect to proceed from any other source than this hope of speedy change. Valombrosa's heart swelled to suffocation as she talked of plans and consolations, which showed she yet dreamt not of the utter ruin that had overwhelmed their fortune; and Rossano sat deeply meditating on the consequences of this strange reverse; trembling to offer what it now seemed indelicate to press.

At present it was not necessary to let her know that her brother was a beggar, and her property involved in the forfeiture of his; but some chords which she touched unconsciously, jarred his whole being, and wrung the truth from him. She asked if they might not retire to *Il bel Deserto*, though banished Florence? — Alas, no! — To his villa in the Casentino? — Nor there. — To her pretty abode on the Tuscan coast? That too was in the Florentine territory, and they must enter on it no more. — "Whither go we then?" asked Rosalia wildly, seeming

now to comprehend, by a recollection of Ippolita's former state, the extent of their misfortune. — " Orlando, have we no home?"—" I shall find one in a camp," returned Valombrosa, making a powerful effort to control his bursting feelings, — " and thou, my sister," — stopping, and turning a speaking glance upon Prince Angelo — " The home — the heart — the whole man is your's and her's!" interrupted Rossano, finding at last the utterance for which he had been labouring. " Oh, Valombrosa, if at such a time I dare utter the long-hoarded wish of my soul — if your sister " — Rossano paused, while with a trembling action he seized Rosalia's hand, and bending his lips to it, pressed it against his fast-beating heart.

" Oh no — no — not now, Prince Angelo!" she exclaimed, scarcely conscious what she said, " hitherto Orlando has devoted his life to me; — from this hour I devote mine to him!" and as she

spoke, with a tearless energy unusual to her, she wrapt her arms round her brother.

Valombrosa was long ere he could recover from the tender and sorrowful transport into which her action and her manner threw him: many tears were shed between them; many touching expressions exchanged: after awhile he said cheeringly, " You cannot devote yourself better to your brother, my Rosalia, than by acquiescing in his wishes, and promoting his exertions. — Remember, I have a new name, and new honours to win, and I must seek them in too rough a path for you to tread. My scene of action now must be a field of war. — The Venetian service is open to me; — her cause is a just one; — I shall not, therefore, draw a merely mercenary sword; — and a campaign or two over, we shall meet again in joy and glory. — You cannot accompany me to a camp — I cannot pass a useless and dependent

life; — our Italian relations must not receive you; — we have no near female ones in Germany — and there is but one home offered you, — the best a brother's love could wish — Rossano's heart! — and what must that home be, which a fond and proud brother bids you fly to in the hour of distress?"

As Valombrosa spoke, he tenderly raised her blushing face from his shoulder, and tried to put her hand into that of the prince; but Rosalia still resisted, though faintly: as faintly she whispered, while again hiding her face on her brother's breast, "In happier times — Orlando — not now. — The joy of Prince Angelo's wife should have no alloy."

"If you feel this, my Rosalia," said Valombrosa, yet more tenderly extricating himself from her soft clasp, and drawing her towards the agitated and silent Prince, "I shall not deem a brother's authority unkindly exerted, when thus I dispose of you. — Take her, Angelo!"

he said in an altered tone, and letting her drop from his arms into those of the kneeling Rossano — "Oh take her, — love her, — cherish her, — protect her from every harm, as I would have done, had Heaven permitted me."

At the last hardly-intelligible words, the brother's heart gave way; and hastily covering his face, he broke from them, and rushed out.

Sweet and bitter were the tears which Valombrosa shed alone.

Life seemed over with him; and beginning with the precious objects he had left: they were henceforth to pass their united days in domestic peace; to draw within one dear and narrow circle all their future hopes, and wishes, and enjoyments; to feel

> " ——— The little strong embrace
> Of prattling children twined around the neck."

While he was thrust out from every possession, and every hope; — a wanderer

and an outcast;—cut off for ever, it should seem, from the sacred affections of husband and of parent! Ippolita and he could never know such happiness together: to attach her now to his fate would be ruin; to hope for it hereafter, madness!—There was but one way likely to place such felicity within his reach; the restoration of her family: and as that was not an impossible, nay, no longer an improbable event, why did Valombrosa persist in believing his union with Ippolita a thing desperate?

Must it be acknowledged?—even the generous, devoted Valombrosa, who would have suffered martyrdom in his person for her sake, shrunk from the idea of owing all things to his wife. To that pride of superiority inherent in him who was proclaimed '*Lord of the Woman*,' the habit of bestowing, and never of receiving, was added in Valombrosa; and for the first time in his life, contemplating the possibility of becoming debtor to Ippolita,

or rather to her family, for the rank he was to bear, and the fortune he was to use, he felt that even perpetual privation would be preferable to such humiliation.

The feeling so aggravated, was not right; but Valombrosa was not perfect: and like all other suffering and erring mortals, his fault was his punishment; for he plunged himself into despair, when he rejected the only hope which his destiny offered.

It was in this gloomy spirit of determined wretchedness, (perhaps natural to one so suddenly precipitated from such a summit of prosperity,) with no other object in view, save a last sight of Ippolita, and a voluntary surrender of the vow which bound her to him, that he parted from Rossano and his sister, after having seen them hastily united in the church of Santa Maria di Galiera.

They turned sorrowing, yet blest in each other, towards Rome, where they

intended to take up their abode; while he travelled with the rapidity of an anguished mind, through Italy into Germany.

Ippolita had yet many questions to ask, ere she resigned herself to the attempt of awakening Valombrosa to better thoughts.

She wished to learn whether Prince Angelo's brother brought tidings from France of her uncle Alviano, whom she supposed to be still a prisoner there; and for whose grief as a parent she felt deeply, whenever she fancied him acquainted with the fate of his son. She heard with painful recollection of other times, that the old warrior was detained by Louis XII. in despite of all solicitations and proposals for his exchange; and that although bowed to the earth at first by the news of Guidobaldo's obscure fall, he had quickly resumed the proud bearing of hardy resolution, and was, when the elder Rossano left France,

braced anew for those years of captivity, which, to the shame of France, became, as he had foreseen, his destiny.

Of young Lorenzo Valombrosa spoke reluctantly, but at length confessed that his agents in Florence were found to be the secret engines of the sanguinary conspiracy against Soderini: that consequently all those who sought the return of the Medici by open and honourable paths, were abhorrent of his black machinations, and unanimous in proclaiming the virtuous Giuliano as the object of their future hopes.

Ippolita turned shuddering from this wounding subject, while inwardly ejaculating a prayer for the soul of this wayward brother.

Among the tender messages with which Valombrosa came charged from Rosalia, was a most earnest entreaty from her and Prince Angelo that Ippolita would repair immediately to Rome, and take up her future residence with them.

Affairs connected with the long captivity and sudden return of his brother, made it necessary for Prince Angelo to be for some time where that brother was; and thus an abode near Rome became indispensable, and was besides a safe one for them all.

To this affectionate invitation Ippolita gave a tearful though steadfast denial. "No," she said, "Valombrosa, if I must learn the hard lesson of forgetting you, at least of forgetting what we hoped so lately, it cannot be near your sister that I should attempt it. I must struggle with this rebellious heart, far, very far from all the remembrances of former days. When time may have softened — reconciled — taught me submission, — (she spoke with convulsive interruption) then perhaps she and I may see each other again, for a brief moment, before I renounce the world altogether."

Shocked and alarmed at her last words, (for Valombrosa had never yet

fancied the future conduct of Ippolita, when he should have taught her to think their union as impossible as he did,) he looked on her as though he would have pierced to her soul. "You will not surely, rashly take" — the remainder of what he would have said died on his pale and quivering lips.

With the hope which his troubled looks awakened, Ippolita's bitter agony changed to one of tender reproach; she burst into impetuous tears, saying as she half-turned from his detaining hand, "Oh Valombrosa, it is you who say we must part for ever! — you read me ill, if you believe that be the success of my family what it may, I will ever share their elevation, unless you partake it with me! — and yet you suggest no hope that less splendid means than those you have been used to, may be hereafter in your power, and hereafter enable" —

Valombrosa interrupted her, by a transported action: "Bless thee, for

this dear suggestion!" he cried, hope and resolution re-kindling in his face. "Say you would cheerfully share a humbler fortune with me than what our youth once promised to both, and I will swear to win such fortune, or perish in the seizing it!"

As rapid in their changes, but widely differing in their intensity, are the emotions of love, and of childhood! A breath can move both, to joy or sadness! Valombrosa now hastily yielded himself to a torrent of enchanting anticipations; and looking solely to the future, saw in glittering perspective before him a new career, honours won, competence acquired, and Ippolita his!

Had the latter yielded as easily to selfish feelings, she could have checked his ardour by the fearful thought of where and how these blessings might terminate — in a soldier's grave! — but her office was to quicken, not to deaden; to inspirit, not to depress: the man she

loved had no choice to make; and it behoved her therefore to smooth, not obstruct the path which he was obliged to tread.

Listening to the effusions of his re-animated spirit, with smiles of tender delight, she cheerfully calculated the probable years of youth which might be consumed ere they could join their fates together: thus giving fresh wings to his hopes, by imparting greater energy to his love.

Meanwhile as she met those speaking eyes, beaming again with expressions familiar to her in his best and brightest days, and thought that all this transport of hope might prove but a deceitful meteor at last, she could have wept at the success of her own effort: she had strength, however, to check the weak impulse.

Far less sanguine herself than she had made him, — for she thought of the peril by which he was to win fortune,

and he forgot it, — but comforted by his revived courage, she entered with him into every subject connected with their past and present views, till the hours wasted, and midnight-mass called on them to separate.

She then went to take her place amongst the veiled sisters in the choir of the chapel, while Valombrosa, now respectfully joined by the silently-observing Renati, knelt in the chancel below.

If the habitually-fervent devotions, both of Ippolita and Valombrosa, were somewhat distracted by other thoughts at this period, perhaps such distraction was not severely judged by that *indulgent Being* before whom they knelt, and in whose "*pure eyes*" virtuous affection is not "*iniquity*:" they were to part on the morrow, when and how to meet again, they trembled to enquire. Many were their causes of deep anxiety,—many were their motives for apprehension, as well as for

gratefulness, — they could not therefore withdraw every thought from earth.

Solely intent upon the future consolations of Valombrosa, and content to leave her own, to time and Heaven, Ippolita longed to prevail with Renati to change her service for that of a fitter master. She had learnt from Valombrosa, that the only attendant he retained was his page Celio, who when himself and all other domestics were hastily dismissed by their unhappy Lord, had forcibly followed him on foot to Bologna, reached that place through surprising difficulties just as he was quitting it, and by his importunate affection obtained leave to share his altered state.

Ippolita could perceive by what Valombrosa said on this occasion, that although gratefully willing to owe his sister's happiness to Prince Rossano, he was not yet sufficiently practised in adversity to endure the thought of owing any thing for himself to friendship, which self-denial

might render unnecessary. A soldier's fare, and a soldier's scorn of all life's delicacies and distinctions, was what he resolved on: thus he thought no longer of attendance which he could not reward. But Celio was a creature he had taken to provide for, and instruct; and that consideration, coupled with the boy's enthusiastic attachment, and perhaps a lingering wish to retain some memorial of home, made him abandon this resolution. He therefore entrusted him to the care of the Venetian commander then in Bologna, from whom he had already received the commission he sought for himself, and promising to reclaim his page at the camp before Mirandola, hastened on to Germany.

Ippolita was pleased for both their sakes, that Valombrosa was to have such a companion. Celio would afford him an object of interest, perhaps of pleasure: for in the vacant moments of a military life he might banish intruding

regrets, by cultivating that talent which had first attracted his kindness to the intelligent boy.

But yet she wanted something more for him,—rather, it may be said, for herself,—she wished to know that Valombrosa had one dauntless follower enured to fatigues and hardships, competent to his own support, yet voluntarily bestowing attendance and duty upon him; ever watchful over his interests and his safety. She had long destined such an office for Renati with her uncle Giuliano for its object: but circumstances were changed, and Valombrosa now claimed her chief care.

To explain these feelings and state her wishes, she saw Renati alone after mass, when she had exchanged adieus for the night with Valombrosa: her heart bounded with joy at the trusty soldier's immediate acquiescence.—"Lady!" he said, his suddenly-dilated eye fixing firmly on her's, "I never would

have asked to quit your side, unless the standard of your family had been openly unfurled, and a force fairly set on foot to plant it where it should always have stood on the towers of Florence: but the moment I heard who the noble-looking stranger was, that I saw enter with you from the valley, and heard that the pernicious French faction had banished him; when I remembered the cowardly act of my Lord Giudobaldo to him, and my own accursed share in it; I was ready to burst out while mass was saying, and tell him what was in my mind. I love stirring, Lady, in a good cause; and I know none better than that of driving those French foxes out of our country; so as you tell me you desire it, and as I suppose you and the Marquis as good as one, if he will accept my humble services, I am his servant and fellow-soldier from this hour."

At this address, Ippolita could not help catching one of Renati's hard hands

in both her's, and that with an expression of such lively gratefulness, that his cheek glistened, and he turned away for the moment. She then bestowed on him many sincere eulogiums and touching thanks for his kindness to herself, commended Valombrosa as earnestly to the same faithful service, and assuring him that she would never repeat a prayer for absent friends, in which his name would not be affectionately included, sent him — herself, all bathed in tears, —subdued to similar weakness.

On the morrow Valombrosa saw the Prioress of Santa Barbara, and conversed with her largely on the merits of his cousin Baron Wernheim: he saw Ippolita's young companion also, the amiable Agatha Reichenhall; and charmed both, by that mixture of nobleness and melancholy, which the adverse feelings of outward humiliation, and inward self-respect, imparted to his whole deportment.

If the lustre of happy youth, which

once distinguished his countenance, was gone, it was replaced by such a touching shade that the heart hung on it, as well as the eye; his voice too, ever powerful over every movement of the soul, seemed increased in pathos and in power:—it was filled indeed with his widely-agitated heart!

With that delight with which true affection beholds its object under every variety of expression, every change of appearance, Ippolita's frequent long look, stole from the face and figure of Valombrosa many a treasure for future recollection, while now and then a passing likeness to his sister, a likeness which she had never felt when seeing them continually together, glanced over his features, and thrilled her to sudden tears. She could not but regret that in reality she must not see the dear friend that look recalled, for many, many months! that she must not witness her happiness with the inestimable Rossano: but Rosalia *was*

happy; and with that conviction, Ippolita checked her own selfish sadness.

The moments fled: Valombrosa was no longer, as formerly, master of his own time and his own actions. He was expected at the camp of the Venetians. He said so to himself often, during those ill-enjoyed, yet wildly-detained moments, which precede that of painful parting: he wished that he had gone before!

The fitful changes of his complexion, and frequent stops in what he said, as if his soul was gone where his suddenly-rivetted eyes were fixed, reminded Ippolita that she ought first to say adieu. She rose, as the conviction struck her; and at her hurried action, those with her, considerately withdrew.

Valombrosa had started from his seat on the instant she quitted her's; his whole face coloured with strong and struggling passions. As Ippolita extended her hand to him, that vivid colouring fled:

he became pale as death, and a smothered cry quivered between his lips.

Ippolita felt her fortitude shake; she turned aside her head, and tried to utter some words of tender benediction; but thronging sobs choked them as they rose, and the next instant she felt herself snatched to Valombrosa's breast.

"This first—this last kiss!" he cried, as with impetuous force he sealed his lips on her's. Long after, did that sad, that thrilling kiss, haunt the trembling lips which received it, reviving the memory of this sweetest and saddest moment of her life; the moment in which she seemed given to, and parted from, Valombrosa for ever!

Neither sigh nor word was exchanged between them during the long interval in which their souls seemed locked up in this dismal embrace; but both at the same instant withdrew from it: and casting on each other a hasty glance of parting blessing, separated at once.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The severest winter ever known in Italy had set in when Valombrosa and Ippolita parted. Yet the contending armies still kept the field; and multitudes perished, merely from the effect of a campaign amongst ices and snows.

The siege of Mirandola, a principality in the Modenese, was undertaken by the warlike Julius in person; and when the Chief Pontiff was thus seen exposing himself to all the rigours of the season, and the dangers of war, for the liberties of Italy, no private individual dared to murmur.

Ippolita knew that it was to this siege Valombrosa was destined; and unhappily, too much familiarised during her

father's life-time, with war and its horrors, to make any illusion to herself upon the dangers to which he would be subjected, she was obliged to confront her fears, and teach herself to bear them.

Another year was begun, and the goal of happiness still flying before her! alas! what a weary race had it been to her! — what changes, what amazing changes had taken place in the destinies of those most dear to her!

When she thought of Valombrosa hurled at once from the very pinnacle of earthly prosperity, to his present abyss of ruin, reason seemed tottering: she had to struggle as it were with her faculties to make herself comprehend how it was possible that he should ever exist out of his natural atmosphere of power and plenty! It was long ere she could picture him a homeless wanderer; but when she did so, what bursts of grief followed! Her heart

indeed required this relief; and it was some time ere she deemed it necessary to check the flow of her tears, and discipline herself into resignation. But she did check them: and in the midst of her saddest musings, the conviction that she had seen Valombrosa again after more than a year's separation, came like reviving breezes on the fainting traveller.

It was sweet to think that he had been in the place which she now occupied! it was inexpressibly delightful to frequent one single spot where the print of his footsteps remained long upon the snow, ere it was effaced by some after passenger's! She would have blushed to have been detected in this folly; but every attached heart has its weaknesses; and must have its indulgencies: and her's, subdued by sadness as well as by tenderness, wanted some secret solace.

Often while her surcharged eyes were

bent on these poor memorials of Valombrosa, the recollection of other days came over her like a flood. She remembered how early she had learned to know the sound and the print of that foot from every other; how often she had timidly turned from the wood-path she was about to enter at *Il bel Deserto*, when she saw the mark of that well-known foot upon the damp and trodden leaves. She recollected the heart's-beatings with which she used to catch even the most distant echo of that step! The disorder of delight and confusion with which she was wont to turn glancing and blushing from his after entrance!

All these tender circumstances pressed upon her memory, followed by the knelling words, "but they are gone,—perhaps for ever!" And as she thought over the days she had spent at *Il bel Deserto*, the idea of its no longer belonging to the master who then

possessed it, wrung her heart to torture.

That lovely residence was of course transferred, as the many villas of her family had been, to other possessors. The house, the pictures, the statues, all that he had created and embellished there, was now perhaps the property of some far different person: one to whom every object of taste was a blank! Yet even that was better than to imagine them enjoyed by an usurper of Valombrosa's rights.

Ippolita wept while she imagined this; for *Il bel Deserto* was so associated with its master's image, that the place seemed identified with himself. The home he had inhabited, the paths on which he was wont to walk, the spots he had adorned or most fondly admired, were all sacred to her. The very faces of his domestics, of those especially whom she was accustomed to see most frequently near his person, were so dear to her

remembrance, that she could not bear the thought of their ever belonging to any other Lord.

In all her former distresses, she had preserved the solace of seeing Valombrosa (whenever she called up the picture of his actions) in the home of his fathers, surrounded by honours and wealth; with power therefore to heighten his own joys, or to soothe his own sorrows, by the lavish dispensation of protection and benefits to others: she had seen him with his sister, mutually blessed and blessing; sheltered from all those hardships and minor pains, which he might himself set at nought, but which she contemplated for him with weeping eyes.

Now, her thoughts followed him in trouble and uncertainty. Vague, and confused, and alarming scenes passed before them; Valombrosa sharing in all — fixed in none. Rude camps, besieged towns, fields of battle, and

groaning hospitals, made up these killing visions.

Since he was to be exposed to them, the very elements seemed to her disordered soul increased in their power of injuring; for now snows appeared always falling, and the icy breath of every blast destined to wither the very roots of life.

From these imaginations, ere they reached the point of absolute distraction, Ippolita still endeavoured to turn towards the soothing idea of Rosalia; and to think of her happy with Rossano.

She could not think it!—Rosalia happy, and the brother on whose bosom it might be said she had been cherished for eighteen years—the brother on whose affection she had depended so long for every blessing of life;—the brother, who to shield her from misery, had held the secret vulture resolutely to his own heart;—she happy, and that brother exiled from all he loved, and seeking

bread at the point of his sword? — No, it was impossible.

Well then, Rosalia was at least partially happy. She had the sympathising bosom of a husband to weep on: and she had his steadier fortitude, to offer timely support to her's. — She was perhaps as blest as any mortal dare hope or wish to be, in a world which should not be so delightful as to make us forget another.

Bereaved of Renati, with whom she used to converse unrestrainedly upon many subjects connected with her dearest hopes, Ippolita was now no longer either able or willing to withhold a knowledge of her situation from Agatha. — She could not always endure the fearful promptings of her own distempered spirit, as she wandered alone, imagining the fatal scenes in which Valombrosa might be engaged at that same moment. The calmer suggestions of another were indispensable to her: so that Agatha by degrees stole upon her confidence, and

became an amiable, though inefficient substitute for her absent friends.

Against the occasional paroxysms of grief into which floating rumours threw her dear companion, Agatha had many affectionate arguments to offer; and often one, which she meant not to urge, but which, speaking unawares from her downcast look and suppressed sigh, stilled Ippolita's impatience at once. That look, that sigh seemed to say, "I too love one who is exposed to all these dangers; I can learn his safety only by chance — for he loves another." There was no appeal after this, from the sentence which Ippolita's own justice past upon her repinings.

As Valombrosa was in the service of that very power which France and Germany sought to crush, he could not, without great difficulty and delays, contrive to send information of himself to Ippolita: but he did so at distant intervals; and these letters, containing per-

haps but a sentence hastily written as some unexpected mode of conveying them presented itself, were the supports of Ippolita's existence.

Public report, and the letters from Agatha's father, gave her the details of the war.

Early in the year, after an obstinate defence, Mirandola surrendered to the arms of Venice and the Holy See; but this advantage threatened disastrous consequences to those who obtained it.

Alarmed at the growing vigour of the Holy League, as it was called, Louis XII. roused himself anew, put forth all his strength, and boldly carried the war at once into the Ecclesiastical States. Bologna, encouraged by his progress, revolted from the dominion of the Pontiff, and several important places followed her example. The whole country of the Bolognese, and of Romagna, became one wide war-field, where the same posts were alternately lost and won, and lost

again, by the contending troops of France and the Empire, Venice and the Church.

The Pontiff himself began to droop, when his fading courage was revived by the very stroke that was meant to level him with the earth.

This event was a proclamation by the Emperor, and King of France, of a general council, to be held at Pisa in the month of September;—its professed object was to reform the Church, scandalized and polluted in the person of its Chief Pontiff: who was, the proclamation asserted, unfit to govern the people of Christ: being addicted to blood and rapine, and fomenting the quarrels of Princes, for the sole purpose of his own aggrandizement.—The Cardinals were called upon, therefore, to consider the propriety of electing a new Pope, and deposing the present; and for this purpose were invited to Pisa, where the representatives of the allied monarchs

would meet them, and co-operate in the pious work.

Enraged at this attack upon his power and person, the intrepid Julius launched a monitory against the rebellious Cardinals who had already repaired to the place appointed, commanding them, on their duty, to return immediately to Rome, and wait for that legitimate council which he himself summoned at the Lateran.

He repulsed with scorn the covert advances of the King of France towards a peace, which the latter hoped to obtain upon terms completely advantageous to himself; and he prosecuted with energy his endeavours to win over entirely to his cause the Kings of Arragon and of England.

When the schismatical council was in fact opened at Pisa, the Pontiff's fury was no longer restrained. He pronounced the sentence of excommunication against that city and Florence, by

whose authority it acted; and evinced the sincerity of his anger, and his future intentions, by appointing the Cardinal de Medici legate of the neighbouring states.

Negociations for peace were begun and broken off more than once during this stormy year; France would not yield up her protection of Bologna; and Julius would listen to no terms, of which the restitution of that city and its dependencies was not the first article. And Ferdinand of Arragon having now become thoroughly convinced that his interests lay with those who sought to check the increasing growth of the French monarchy, a fresh league was entered into, with many imposing solemnities, between Venice, Arragon, and the Holy See, purporting its design to be the extirpation of the schism which was begun in the Church by the contumacious meeting at Pisa, and the deliverance of Italy from the yoke of a foreign power.

The rebellious Cardinals were degraded from their rank, by a solemn act of the Pope in full consistory; and fresh troops were levied, for the express purpose of overawing the faction in Florence, which it was said alone supported Soderini in his authority.

This assertion had more than a colour of truth; for a circumstance occurred, which proved that the inferior classes of the Florentines were beginning to dread the effects of the Pope's wrath, and the French King's insidious friendship. As the excommunicated Cardinals were performing mass in the church of San Michele, at Pisa, a private affray between a French soldier and one of the towns-people, collected together a concourse of persons; and affording a pretext for wider quarrel, a scene of bloodshed ensued between French and Italians, which showed the smothered suspicions of the latter, and was at length terminated solely by the strongest exertions of the civil power.

The affray, however, had been so serious, and the sentiments of the multitude, both at Pisa and Florence, upon the impiety of the council, so fiercely expressed, that the persons belonging to it deemed it prudent to remove from the probable consequences of a future riot, and suddenly translated themselves to Milan, the capital of the French King's dominions in Italy. Meanwhile the preparations of Julius for revenging himself upon the Gonfaloniere, and repelling the encroachments of France, went on vigorously. Encouraged by promises of active aid from England, where Giuliano de Medici was again gone from Spain, and his army swelled by some of the best Spanish and Neapolitan troops, Julius presented a formidable aspect to the ambitious Louis. The attempts of the latter to engage the Florentines openly in his quarrel, were however productive only of mortification to himself, and of hope to the friends of the Medici: for

though the Gonfaloniere declared himself in council of opinion, that it was incumbent on them to assist with men and money their faithful ally Louis of France, though he produced, in a speech of great length, many arguments for this conduct, and attempted many exhortations to that purpose, the majority of the members within, and the whole body of the people without, declared against any other line of conduct than the strictest neutrality. So that with this auspicious circumstance, and the capture of all the most important places in the Ferrarese, by the armies of Venice and Rome, terminated the year 1511.

A new year began with the usual mixture of success and disaster. The arms of the Pope were foiled in his attempt to recover Bologna; and the cities of Bergamo and Brescia regained by the Venetians with fearful expence of life, were quickly lost again, with yet greater bloodshed.

But the Pontiff's negociations had been more successful than his sword. By the timely application of a considerable sum of money, he purchased the Emperor's consent to a year's truce with the Venetians; thus withdrawing that monarch for awhile from his prosecution of their ruin: he incited the navy of England to make descents upon the French coast, and he persuaded the King of Arragon to pass the Pyrenees, and invade France itself.

Thus Louis XII. seemed left all at once, not only to stand the whole brunt of the war in the country he was ambitiously aiming to conquer, but was obliged to make head against it, at several points of his own dominions.

He possessed, however, a host, in the person of Gaston de Foix; a general whose arm never was stayed in any act of vengeful policy by one thrill of human pity. Ruthless as brave; uniting the activity and vigour of youth to that intuitive

genius for war, which exceeds experience, and gives unlimited authority over a gallant army, this young commander seemed born to realise the tales of fabled demi-gods. The celerity of his movements was only equalled by the rapidity of his conquests; and the remorseless vengeance with which he punished revolt or resistance, struck terror into all that meditated either.

After raising the siege of Bologna, retaking Brescia and Bergamo, storming fortresses and putting whole garrisons to the sword, he published his resolution of advancing to the gates of Rome itself; and marching towards it in defiance of the Spanish and papal army, which hung upon his rear, suddenly turned aside, and fell like a thunderbolt upon the city of Ravenna. Fortunately a division of the Venetian army had just been added to the garrison of this important place, and the hot assault of De Foix's confident troops was repulsed after a contest of hours.

Driven, for the first time in his life, with loss and shame from the ramparts of the town he stormed, De Foix drew up his troops under the walls of Ravenna merely to take breath, ere he sprung with tenfold fury upon his gallant prey.

The army of the Pope which had hitherto cautiously confined itself to watch the enemy's movements and cut off his supplies, now hastened to seize the favourable moment, and advancing suddenly, placed him between its lines and the force in the town.

A decisive battle seemed now inevitable. De Foix was too resolute and too fortunate to endure for an instant the mention of retreat; and it seemed the interest of the allies not to permit him.

Both armies were strong and impatient of delay, equally matched in numbers, and equally aware that the fate of Italy hung upon the event of a single day. The balance of strength, indeed, might be said to incline to the side of France;

for her general was Gaston de Foix; and the Duke of Ferrara, the most skilful engineer and most experienced soldier of his day, was at the head of her artillery.

In opposition to these, might be ranked Marco Antonio Colonna, and the Marquis Pescara, competitors of De Foix, in the race of military glory. The former commanded in the citadel, and with his brave band had repulsed De Foix's assault upon the town: the latter headed the cavalry in the camp. — As young, as active, as dauntless, not yet as fortunate as their ferocious rival, they surpassed him in a warrior's best attribute—mercy. It was under the banner of Marco Colonna, that Valombrosa fought, and by an act of singular intrepidity on the ramparts of Ravenna, attracted that General's admiration, and ensured his future friendship. Ippolita knew from report, that he had already distinguished himself in several of those affairs of posts, which afford individuals the oppor-

tunity of displaying military talent as well as personal courage. It was said, indeed, that he pushed boldness to the verge of rashness; that he always played a fearful game for distinction or death; that he appeared at all times ready to risk life for the smallest accession of honour or honourable profit.

Every one marvelled at the unconcern with which he passed in one moment from habits of splendid delicacy, to the severest discipline of mind and body; they were astonished at the intense attention which he gave to the theoretical study of his profession; and they comprehended not how he that had once been Marquis of Valombrosa, could rejoice as his sparkling countenance evinced he did, at each accession of mere military rank. They knew not that his heart had a dearer aim, even than glory, that of securing independence for himself and the woman he loved. And they forgot, that he who had hitherto filled up a peaceful life by the

exercise of benevolent virtues, needed the majestic echo of military renown, to satisfy him that the far-different deeds by which he called it forth, were in truth useful and meritorious.

Valombrosa's intrepidity and indifference to every casualty of a campaign, made him very soon an object of admiration to the common soldiers. His kindness and enchantment of manner endeared him to his brother officers: thus he lived in camps as he had done in palaces, beloved and respected, the same character accompanying him every where.

Ippolita heard of him through many channels: for now the truce between Germany and Venice enabled her to receive letters from her friends at Rome, from her uncles in Italy, whither Giuliano was returned, and to hear yet more frequently of Baron Wernheim.

Her letters from Rome ever caused her the purest feelings of delight, of which

she was now capable; they described the domestic felicity of Rosalia and Rossano with such affecting simplicity, and they breathed so animated an affection for herself.

The events mentioned in some of these letters as contemplated in prospect, and afterwards realized in others, made her start at the time which was escaping from her.—Time was indeed vanishing; for Rosalia had long been a wife, and was now become a mother.

Ippolita shed tears of tender joy over the few affecting lines with which Prince Angelo gave her this information; she thought how Valombrosa would have loved this child of Rosalia's, and her tenderly-joyful tears changed into sad ones.

Hostilities having ceased for awhile on the side of Germany, Baron Wernheim seized that opportunity of visiting Bavaria on business of his own; after which he came into Saltzburgh to see Ippolita and

his aunt, and to bear Agatha Reichenhall a welcome summons from her father.

When Ippolita saw the Baron, she guessed from the more than usually-settled look of his countenance, and the carefully-preserved composure of his manner, that some unpleasant circumstance had occurred to him. She was not deceived: he had just broken with the restless coquet whom his unavoidable absence had wearied out and offended.

Rumours had reached him of admirers encouraged, and schemes of conquest carried on, inconsistent with the vows pledged to him; and finding these rumours true, he had expostulated in the true spirit of manly dignity. The Lady recriminated by reproaching him with too deep an interest in the concerns of Ippolita de Medici.

Wernheim explained; but his fair mistress was either incapable of comprehending, or pretended to be so, the nature of an attachment to herself which

did not exclude friendly zeal for another woman as young and beautiful as she.—And she balanced her own levities, therefore, she said, against his more sentimental infidelity.

The man this Lady had to deal with was one without weakness: she had previously outraged all his notions of what was amiable and valuable in woman, and now with this inflexible resolution he withstood first the assault of her anger, and afterwards that of her seeming contrition.

The consequences are obvious: he left Bavaria regretting, but not repenting; determined to banish from his thoughts the woman whom he was convinced was not formed to make a man of principle happy.

In this mood he came to the convent of Santa Barbara, and though he spoke not to Ippolita of his situation, she guessed it from his manner, and she learnt it from the Prioress.

So interested as Ippolita was, in the unpretending attachment of Agatha, and justly prejudiced against the first object of Wernheim's admiration, it was not possible for her to bestow more than transient pity on his present feelings; she hoped they would soon lose their sting: and that the intimacy which providential events seemed destined to increase between him and Colonel Reichenhall, might eventually lead him to make a worthier and a happier choice.

With this hope in prospect, she spoke of Agatha with greater warmth of praise than she would have allowed herself to have done to the betrothed husband of another; amiably contriving to introduce her name and her merits frequently into their conversations, and thus awakening the Baron's attention to Agatha herself.

Agatha, however, did not long indulge in the secret satisfaction of

seeing Baron Wernheim in the society of his aunt and her friend: she delayed not a moment after the arrival of the trusty servant appointed by her father to escort her into Bavaria; and thus afforded Ippolita another opportunity of remarking her filial virtue.

Wernheim simply thought Agatha's self-denial only consisted in the cheerful resignation of this dear friend, for the sombre retirement of an old mansion with a war-worn parent; but the sentiment had value enough for him even so: Ippolita discerned this, and left the remainder of her kind project to time and Providence.

Many were her themes of tenfold interest with the excellent Baron. She had so much to ask and to hear concerning the campaign; so many apprehensions to have dissipated or soothed! she had so much to answer him on the cruel subject of Valombrosa's exile!

Upon this subject, Wernheim's best

feelings were displayed; and all that the most liberal nature could offer, or the strongest respect for the ties of blood suggest, was offered and suggested by him.

He had learned the nature of his cousin's regard for Ippolita, from those circumstances connected with his arrest at Florence, which Valombrosa had deemed it incumbent on him to repeat to a kinsman so worthy of his confidence; and he therefore showed himself anxious, not only to smooth the difficulties which might oppose themselves to their future union, but to open for Valombrosa some direct path to fortune and honour.

Wernheim could do much at the court of his own Emperor, he said, and he convinced Ippolita that it would not be difficult for him to obtain Valombrosa either an honourable post there, or a distinguished rank in the German army. But Valombrosa's

wedded attachment to his country rendered the plan of thus transplanting him (even though she had cast him forth) nearly hopeless; and the shrinking delicacy of his feelings with regard to pecuniary affairs, made it as impossible for Wernheim to press on him any generous share of his ampler means.

Ippolita loved the principle of both these feelings, too well to wish them altered in Valombrosa; and while her breast glowed with grateful esteem for Wernheim's kindness, she felt content to wait, though for agitating years, till Valombrosa should have gradually advanced to that moderate independence with which he had promised to be content, and without which, they must for ever remain divided.

But while he, she thought, was thus slowly advancing towards competency, what might be her destiny! — perhaps Providence might ordain that she should be suddenly elevated with her family to

the height they had originally fallen from: and if so, that would rather increase than diminish her perplexities, since Valombrosa no longer stood on the same high ground of equality with her kindred. His delicacy, or pride, or self-respect, she knew not what to term the feeling, would surely oppose itself to her wishes; as surely, would be added opposition from every individual of her own family, her uncle Giuliano excepted. If her hand were demanded to reward some ally, or secure some acquisition; in short, were her family again Princes in Florence, she might become a mere political instrument, and be commanded, under the plea of patriotic duty, to forget the obligations and promises of the exiled Ippolita.

Secure, however, of her own heart, and of that of her dearest uncle, Ippolita feared only Valombrosa's pride, concealed as it would be from his own eyes, and therefore the more dangerous,

under the disguise of noble self-sacrifice. She knew that he would think it his duty to resign her to a higher destiny than that of union with a soldier of fortune; and as surely think his honour required him not to accept the restoration of his fortunes but from the regular justice of his country. Alas! on all sides lay difficulties, and rested clouds: and Ippolita's spirit must have fainted at the view, had she not remembered how often clouds as dark and dismal as these had been cleared up before her. Many were the rapturous instances of miraculous change in her situation which she now recalled, striving to temper present anxiety, by the recollection of past mercies.

When Baron Wernheim reached Santa Barbara, he knew that the army of France was on its march to Ravenna, and that Valombrosa was among the troops which had just been thrown into the town under Marco Antonio Colonna. Ever

inclined himself, to know the truth of every situation in which he was placed, Wernheim believed the same of Ippolita, and therefore told her all that was to be hoped and feared in the present instance.

Ippolita's blood froze while she heard him say that the fate of Italy depended upon the battle which, from the movements of the Pope's army, (with which her uncle the Cardinal moved,) was judged inevitable. She must now pray for more than Valombrosa's life; for the success of a cause on which hung the future prosperity, perhaps the lives of her whole family!

So recently deprived of Agatha's affectionate sympathy, and accustomed respectfully to conceal all her private feelings from the world-forgetting Prioress, Ippolita looked with dismay to the moment which now approached, of Wernheim's departure: from him only could she hope for any support against her occasional forebodings; yet it was neither pro-

per nor possible to detain him. Decorum would not permit him to extend his stay with his aunt; and as he proposed visiting Colonel Reichenhall immediately after quitting Saltzburgh, Ippolita felt too anxious for Agatha's chance of interesting him further, not to speed his journey, and return his serious adieus with a smile as well as a tear.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The evening on which the Baron left Santa Barbara, was dark and portentous; and scarcely had he been gone an hour, when one of the most tremendous storms Ippolita had witnessed, even in this country of storms, began to roar among the mountains and devastate the valleys.

It was the last day of March, and seemingly the last struggle of winter with the coming season. A tempest of hail and rain was mixed with thunder and lightning, and furious winds. Trees crashed and torrents roared; and the Salza, already swelled by melted snows, was so fearfully augmented by the influx of numerous torrents, that it rose above its banks, (those only excepted which

formed the pass into the Tyrol,) and overflowed the adjacent country.

Alarmed for the safety of Baron Wernheim, Ippolita eagerly seconded the anxious cares of the Prioress: she added her exhortations to those of the latter, when she ordered forth the persons usually sent in search of the wayfaring and injured, and she refused retiring to rest until intelligence should be received of him.

The hour was not late enough for complete darkness, yet all was dark; save only when vivid lightning, by its continuous and livid flashes, filled the whole valley with a horrible brightness. Then were seen the single trees which it had struck, splintering and blazing among the black woods to which they belonged; while the whole extent of Santa Barbara was covered as if with consuming fire.

The Prioress at the head of her nuns, came forth, and prostrated themselves under this awful canopy of sulphureous

clouds, before a huge cross which stood alone in the centre of the valley. Unveiled, and resting their pale foreheads on the steps of the sacred emblem, they implored protection for themselves and others, from the lightnings which ran like streams of liquid fire down its mossy sides.

Through the mingled roar of tossing woods, and dashing waters, and pealing thunders, was now heard at intervals the sound of their own signal bell near the Pass. At its first echo, the Prioress dispatched more of her people in that particular direction, her own heart and that of Ippolita palsying with the fear that it was to Wernheim this thrilling bell now summoned assistance.

Moments seemed hours from the first faint call of that bell to the instant in which it ceased: and again they seemed endless, until the object of their anxiety appeared, in company with some of the servitors of Santa Barbara.

He came, not assisted himself, but

helping to convey with care and celerity a man completely covered with cloaks taken from his conductors, and whose dismal groans were audible even through all the fury of the raging elements.

The lanthorns which the servants carried, transmitted only a sullen light, so that when they paused on the steps of the cross, Ippolita could but distinguish a mass of drapery, which indicated that some one lay under it. She saw, however, Wernheim's countenance distinctly, and that gave the alarm to her perturbed fancy. It might have been but an expression of pure horror which she saw there, through the blue quiver of the lightning; but whatever it was, a panic seized her, and the images of Valombrosa, of her uncle Giuliano, of Prince Rossano, of the faithful Renati, all at once rushed into her mind, and prompted her to lift the cloak thrown over the sufferer. — Wernheim caught her wrist as she suddenly tried to do so, and stayed the

action. "Forbear!" he hurried out, "'twill shock you. — He is too horribly mangled."

Ippolita was just sinking from the hand which grasped her's, when Wernheim, reading the effect of his words in her deathly look, added more hastily, "'Tis none you know: — a stranger — on my life, a stranger!"

Ippolita spoke not, but she smiled expressively, and closing her eyes, sunk for a few moments nearly insensible against the side of the cross.

When she recovered, she saw the bearers of the wounded man, hurrying onwards; and suddenly nerved by gratitude and compassion, she followed them tremblingly, relieved from her own fears, but humanely anxious to see if she could minister to the unfortunate person.

Upon reaching the house, the sufferer was borne to the infirmary, there to have his hurts examined by the holy brother who filled the office of surgeon.

Baron Wernheim attended him thither, and after long absence returned to inform the Prioress, that her miserable guest was an ordinary traveller, who bewildered by the storm, had mistaken his way, lost his footing, and so been precipitated from the rocks of the Pass into the river below.

Wernheim, providentially, had halted at the commencement of the tempest in the chapel of the order at the foot of the Pass, where he found two peasants sheltering also. — The cries of the mangled and drowning wretch had called them all forth to his rescue, and with much peril and difficulty they had succeeded in extricating him from the furious water.

The state of mutilation and agony in which Wernheim described this person, made even the Prioress shudder, accustomed as she was to the sight of fearful accidents; but she made no attempt to persuade Ippolita from sharing the task of the sister appointed to

aid the surgeon through the night in his pious attendance.

Grateful for the relief of knowing that this sufferer was not any of those valued persons, whose images had rushed into her mind not long before, the spirit of her religion prompted Ippolita to evince that gratitude by active charity: she therefore obtained permission to watch with sister Ernestina through the night.

Mildly resolute in the performance of whatever act she rightly purposed, Ippolita was not to be deterred now by Baron Wernheim's avowed wish of sparing her the sound of the poor wretch's groans, and the sight of his torments. She took up a lamp, and bending her head silently to the nightly benediction of the Prioress, went out with sister Ernestina.

The hospital-room into which they entered, was at this time void of any other occupants than the wounded man, and the confessor of the convent.

The surgeon had left him awhile to the spiritual medicine of the father, and he now lay at the lower end of the long apartment, in one of its numerous and half-curtained beds.

As they entered Father Joseph was kneeling by the bed-side, his crucifix clasped in both hands, and his time-faded eyes raised to heaven, with an expression of more than ordinary earnestness and horror.

Ippolita softly approached the venerable man; yet dreading a full sight of the sufferer, kept back behind the shade of the curtain.

Sister Ernestina advanced on the other side, and addressed some words to the confessor. "Daughter!" was the reply, "his body is past help or hope: his soul, too, is sick unto death. But there is *one* who has promised to heal all spiritual wounds, if the sinner will confess and repent."

The good man then applied himself to

incite the sufferer to unload his breast of the sins with which he had acknowledged it was burthened; mixing awful arguments with the tenderest persuasions of Christian love.

During this discourse, the traveller groaned often and heavily, and Ippolita trembling at their sound, sunk unconsciously upon her knees while internally imploring mercy for him, from the God against whom he confessed to have sinned.

When Father Joseph concluded his exhortation, a long silence followed: it was interrupted only by the fast and labouring breaths of the unhappy sinner. All at once, he spoke; and the tones of his hoarse and hollow voice, curdled Ippolita's blood with hideous recollections.

"Is there no hope?" he cried, "must I die? Are these torments that you tell of, everlasting? — Is there no way to escape?"

"One only way," replied the Father, "by confession of your sins, by reparation, if you can yet make it to any fellow-creature, for what you have done against him; and by repentance alone, where it is no longer in your power.— He that hung for you upon this cross, has promised eternal life, on such conditions, to the foulest sinner."

"Reparation!" repeated the wretch, involuntarily attempting to raise himself from his pillow, "How shall I make it? — Where am I to find the Marquis?"

"What Marquis?" exclaimed Ippolita, starting up, tearing aside his curtain, and presenting to him a face pale and wild as that of a spectre.

"The Marquis Valombrosa," returned the sufferer, solely occupied with his own torments, and believing her a sister of the house.

"Ah, wretch!" she exclaimed, recognising him fully as the mysterious visitor of the Banquetting-House, and forgetting

every other person present; "if you hope for mercy to your passing soul, confess your crimes against the injured Valombrosa."

"And who asks this?" demanded Magliano, with a convulsive start, big drops of pain and remorse standing on his brow.

"Ippolita de Medici," she returned; then melting from the stern fixture of look with which she had hitherto regarded him, and sinking again on her knees, she added in a tremulous voice, "O let me conjure you in the name of God,—for the sake of your own precious soul, make instant confession of your sins against Valombrosa. That false oath which deprived him of his honour and his country—unswear it now; and if you cannot restore his fortunes by that act, at least restore to him his good name."

Exhausted by the suddenness and violence of her emotions, she stopt, while Father Joseph took the opportunity

of putting a few judicious questions to Magliano. These questions, seconded by the most urgent entreaties that he would do the justice which Ippolita demanded, and which his own salvation required, threw the sufferer into such increased agonics of body and mind, that those present, though evidently perceiving that his terrors prompted instant confession, were alarmed lest he should not live to make it.

Incited by this salutary dread, Ippolita, who hung over him as though his slightest word contained the whole treasure of her future being, besought him to do away his false oath against Valombrosa, by one given to Father Joseph, declaring Valombrosa's innocence; and after that to proceed with the details of his past life.

The good monk saw the wisdom of this suggestion; and gathering in a few words from Ippolita the substance of what he was to ask, and what the sufferer was

expected to reply, put it down in writing, and read it to Magliano.

This declaration purported, that what he had sworn in the December of the year 1510 against the Marquis Valombrosa, was false and malicious; prompted thereto by the offer of a considerable bribe from one hostile to the Marquis, and by some personal resentments of his own. It declared, that whatever interviews he had had with the Marquis related solely to business of a private nature, in which politics never had the slightest share; and that he had every reason to believe the Marquis Valombrosa a true and loyal subject to the republic and its chief magistrate.

This declaration was read to the dying man by Father Joseph, and the signature of the former was affixed to it, witnessed by the Priest, sister Ernestina, and Ippolita, and by the medical brother who had been called for that purpose.

No sooner was it done, than Ippolita

snatching the precious document to her lips, fell on her knees, and while she pressed it against her breast, as if to her very soul, uttered aloud a fervent thanksgiving for Valombrosa, and as earnest a prayer for the amazed and dying sinner.

Ippolita could not weep; but many a convulsive gasp and smile, mixed with broken transports, and fearful shudderings, showed how greatly she was moved.

Sister Ernestina seeing her extreme agitation, mildly advised her to remove to a distance, until her spirits were more composed, and Ippolita followed the kind counsel.

Retired to the further end of the long dormitory, she walked to and fro, lost in alternate trances of wonder and gratitude for the blessing just obtained; of fear that Magliano should not live to complete his penitence, by owning, as she hoped he would, that all his communications to Valombrosa had been false; and of

anguish for the guilty creature's awful state.

Quickened by this hope of learning something more important to Valombrosa's peace, she strongly wrestled against her trembling spirits, and summoning all the courage she possessed, returned to the other division of the dormitory.

At the moment, Father Joseph was raising Magliano's swathed and ghastly head, while sister Ernestina was pouring some potent cordial into his lips, and the surgeon was calculating its effect by the pulsation of the sufferer's heart. The lamp held by the monk, threw its full light upon the disfigured face which Ippolita now saw covered with the damps of death and the darkness of despair: she had last seen it, expressive of libertine admiration and insolent derision. She shuddered at the contrast; and for some instants was incapable of utterance: but speedily rallying herself, she adjured Magliano not to let one spark of remain-

ing life escape, without attempting to make full confession of all his sins against him whose honour and happiness it might be yet in his power to restore.

Father Joseph enforced her entreaties by his Christian authority; and Magliano evidently racked with pangs of remembered guilt, and stung by the terror of that unknown world to which he was hastening, by slow degrees, and interrupted intervals, made a confession, in which most of the following circumstances were included,

Torquato Valori, Marquis of Valombrosa, married a Tyrolese lady whose affections were engaged to another; but unconscious of this circumstance, he lived with her some years in that moderate degree of happiness of which his unamiable nature was capable.

She bore him several children, none of whom lived, except the eldest and youngest, Orlando and Rosalia.

Lucio, the Marquis's only child by a

former marriage, early learned to hate a half-brother whose engaging physiognomy, even in childhood, rendered his revolting aspect more displeasing; and as Orlando, though five years his junior, excelled Lucio in every exercise of body and mind, the latter was continually smarting under the mortifying consciousness of evident inferiority.

In a fierce dispute one day, concerning an already-suffering animal, which Lucio was wantonly tormenting, the fiery Orlando, in a transport of outraged sensibility and excessive indignation, struck his brother down, and spurned him with his foot.

The reprehensible act was committed in the presence of his mother, who thinking only of the right feeling which impelled it, unwisely sought to justify the action for the motive's sake. When called afterwards into his father's presence, to whom Lucio complained, Orlando refused to ask pardon for what

he had done, boldly grounding his own defence upon the provocation Lucio had given him in so cowardly an attack upon an unoffending, defenceless, suffering creature; and the Marchioness so successfully pleaded the same cause, that Orlando was neither punished nor humbled.

From that moment Lucio conceived the most deadly hatred against both mother and son; the petty events of successive years gradually added to his smothered feelings of envy and hatred, till at length both amounted to a thirst for vengeance which demanded satisfaction at any price.

Torquato, though incapable from the cold selfishness of his character, of true paternal feelings, was proud of his younger son's graces and popularity; and believing him therefore likely to form some splendid alliance, if these natural advantages were heightened by the gifts of fortune, publicly declared his

intention of dividing his enormous possessions equally between the brothers: thus laying the foundations of two powerful families.

This act, though vehemently protested against, by the generous and imprudent Orlando, sealed the deadly hatred of Lucio; and conjecturing that it had its origin in the Marchioness's power over her husband, he determined to take vengeance upon her for this injustice, and upon her son for the nobleness which humbled him.

Means, and an agent, were soon found. The Marchioness had a woman about her person, who had lived with her before she married, and had been the unavoidable confidant of her stolen meetings with Count Stolzenau: this woman was a widow, and the mother of a dissolute son, to support whose extravagance and idleness, she made the sacrifice of her own salary, and became by slow degrees greedy of every species

of gain. When a lad, this worthless son had ran away from an honourable service in which he was placed at Florence, and having been suspected at the time of theft, had never returned since, except incognito, when he came to extort money from his infatuated parent.

Upon Ursula's passion for this spendthrift, and some discontents of her own with her Lady, Lucio found it easy to work; and by the adroit union of bribes, now, and promises for the future, won from her not only the story of her Lady's attachment to Count Stolzenau, but some particulars, with which, and a little addition, he believed it possible to effect his guilty purpose.

At the time in which Stolzenau returned the Marchioness's letters, he had done it through the medium of Ursula. The letters were accompanied with one or two valuable jewels, which as the gifts of her who was now the wife

of another, he shrunk from wearing; and these rich ornaments having tempted Ursula to secrete all that was thus entrusted to her, she kept the letters, at first from irresolution whether to give or withhold them, lest their restoration should discover her detention of the jewels; and at last ceased to think of them at all. It was not until Lucio's arts won her to aid his scheme of ruining her Lady's fame, that she remembered they were still in existence.

Won by the gold, if not by the frantic eloquence of Stolzenau just before he consigned these letters to her care, she had endeavoured to obtain her Lady's consent to a single interview with him: an interview in which the Count's sole object was that of seeing the woman he loved, once again, ere he renounced his country, and abjured the world. But the Marchioness rebuking her for this criminal attempt to weaken her duty to her Lord, Ursula from that moment

felt her ground changed; and no longer the humble friend of her formerly too-confiding mistress, sunk into the discontented servant.

Refused an interview by the object of his wild passion, and thirsting to show her what a wreck she had made of his peace, Stolzenau contrived to way-lay her as she was getting into the carriage which was to convey her and her child into the country. He rushed from a group of idle gazers in the street, cast a piercing look upon the Marchioness, caught and clasped the little Orlando to his breast, for it was her child, and disappeared ere the Marquis, who witnessed the scene from the portico of his palazzo, could order him to be seized.

So extraordinary an action was supposed to be that of a lunatic; and the Marchioness's violent indisposition at the instant, a natural consequence of the alarm it occasioned. The person who had thus terrified her, was never seen

nor heard of again; and the thing was soon forgotten by all but the unhappy Marchioness herself, upon whose feeble character it continued to prey with all the anguish of self-accusation.

Some words which she had caught from Stolzenau as he fled, and the ghastly alteration of his person, assured her that his peace was destroyed for ever; and from that hour she herself sunk into that joyless state which had early clouded the home of Orlando, without diminishing his affection for his mother.

A picture of Stolzenau, which she had wanted the proper resolution to destroy or return, now became the companion of her solitary moments: and for this lesser sin against a sacred duty, this culpable wife was destined hereafter, — must it be said justly? — to suffer the punishment of that actual guilt to which such unlawful indulgencies are calculated to lead.

In possession of this fact, through the means of the prying and betraying Ursula, Lucio laid his plan accordingly.

When his father, piqued by opposition to his will, into greater obstinacy, persisted in declaring to the generously-persuading Orlando that he meant to share his estates as he had intimated, Lucio affected perfect satisfaction: but Ursula assumed an air of strange distraction; and tutored by her young Lord, threw herself at the Marquis's feet, in the presence of the former, declaring her conscience would not permit her to witness such injustice. — She declared that Orlando was the offspring of Count Stolzenau, whose wild passion had hurried her unhappy Lady into a temporary forgetfulness of virtue, at the very time she was contracted to another. — She confessed herself the unfortunate confidant of that sad story; and offered proofs in one or two letters which Lucio had previously selected from those in her posses-

sion, as the ones most capable of being wrested to their purpose. — She finished by recalling the incident of the supposed maniac's seizure of young Orlando, declaring him and Count Stolzenau one and the same person.

The existence of such a rival had never been made known to the Marquis during the period of his short courtship: the family of his wife withheld the secret from him; and she, too timid to utter it herself, sought refuge from his passion in that silent reserve which passed for maiden modesty. When afterwards she was threatened and persuaded into becoming his wife, the cold austerity of his character deterred her from ever alluding to her past feelings.

Torquato now heard this therefore for the first time. — The mere concealment of a former attachment seemed evidence against its purity; and the well-feigned incredulity of Lucio at the beginning, and his seemingly gradual conviction

afterwards, joined to the consummate art with which he played on the pride and prejudices of his father, produced such amazement and confusion in the faculties of the latter, that it is not wonderful he should at once admit the belief of his Lady's guilt, and his son's illegitimacy.

Much address was necessary to keep him from bursting upon her on the instant with accusation and vengeance. Lucio, however, effected this; and his fiend-like promptings, finally prevailed to make his father consent that the former should immediately convey her, under some plausible excuse, to one of his villas in the Val d'Arno, and that the Marquis should then take that opportunity of convincing himself of Ursula's truth, by forcing open the cabinet in which Stolzenau's miniature was said to be lodged: if found, and compared with his recollection of the strongly-marked features of him who had formerly embraced the little Orlando, Lucio plau-

sibly suggested that it would thus afford them a rule whereby to judge the rest of Ursula's allegations. — He then offered himself, though he protested most unwillingly, to avenge his father's honour (if his step-mother were unhappily found guilty) in whatever way he chose.

The result of this plan was success. The Marchioness was beguiled from Florence without seeing her husband; the picture was found, the likeness recognized, and the Marquis dispatched these explicit lines to his son:

"Lucio, I am convinced. — I take you at your word: — she must die. — Rid me of a pernicious wife, and yourself of a step-mother who would have impudently wronged you. — Pay Ursula well for future silence, and send her out of my sight.

VALOMBROSA."

The unconscious Marchioness was supping with her step-son when this billet reached him. His plan had been pre-

viously concerted, and this was the signal for putting it into execution: he bade her good night; and the Marchioness retired to the room whence she never came out.—Ursula, who had undressed her, watched officiously by her bed, till she saw her asleep; then heaping the stove with fresh fuel, and closing every aperture against the escape of its murderous fumes, she departed; leaving her victim to silent but certain death.

The wages of this iniquity were to Ursula an annuity from the Marquis. Lucio was gratified by the assurance of all the Valombrosa estates, and the utter exclusion of Orlando from any thing but a share with Rosalia of their mother's small portion.

A will to this effect was executed on the instant by the gloomy Marquis, and delivered into Lucio's own hands: but happily for Orlando, it perished in that rencontre with the robbers of the Bolognese under whose murderous wea-

pons he and his father fell, not many months afterwards. The Valombrosa succession, therefore, went on as nature and justice would have ordered.

With cunning foresight Ursula had contrived to secrete the Marquis's note to his son when the latter thought he had destroyed it; purposing to use it upon occasion, if her guilty colleague's great promises failed of fulfilment when he should come into possession of the family wealth. His awful catastrophe, however, rendered the precaution abortive with regard to him, but afforded her worthless heir a mean of poisoning the peace of an innocent man, and of enriching himself.

Ursula returned into Germany, and for some time enjoyed her comparative riches with few pangs of conscience. But the son for whose sake she had steeped her soul in guilt, embittered all her enjoyments; pillaged and ill-treated her: till sinking from selfish sorrow into

remorse and fear, the wretched woman at last expired, after confessing to her son the crimes she had committed for his sake; and charging him, as he hoped for mercy on his own soul, and wished it for her's, to travel with the papers she then entrusted to him, to the young Marquis Valombrosa, and say how basely she had abused the trust of both his parents.

A profligate gamester, in the zenith of health and strength, and scorn of another world, was not likely to make any other use of these documents, and of his mother's confession, than that which has been shown. Dying now in greater anguish of body and mind than he had seen his wretched parent die, he confessed in his turn, that the idea of making two separate engines of extortion out of the same story, first struck him when he found Valombrosa imagined his mother was murdered solely through his brother's revengeful machinations. Magliano gave a fearful account of his own

dissolute life; which, by rendering continual supplies of money indispensable, seared his heart against any feeling of pity for his noble victim.

The same habits and the same need had thrown him into the Florentine conspiracy, and tempted him to accept the bribe which was to swear away the honour and fortunes of a man on whom he had preyed so long.

This bribe followed the fate of all that he had wrung from Valombrosa; and driven at last from Italy, by detection in more than one act of infamous embezzlement at the gaming-tables of its principal cities, and reduced to more than ordinary distress, he was making his way on foot to Vienna, when the hand of invisible justice hurled him down the precipice which was destined to be the last scene of his impious and iniquitous life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The emotions of Ippolita, while listening to this fearful confession, would be vain to attempt describing; for every word Magliano uttered, had connection with the past sufferings and present adversity of the man dearest to her. She seemed to live again through the period in which she had witnessed the effect of what she now heard upon the tortured Valombrosa: and no longer did she wonder that he shrunk from imparting even to her, in their last meeting, the direful story of a father's crime.

But the more she felt the magnitude of his sorrow, the more fervent became her admiration of the generous resolution with which he had confined it to his own

breast. Perhaps that generous self-sacrifice had led to greater evils than those he dreaded; yet was its fraternal motive so pure and noble, that Ippolita dreamt not of its being alloyed by any deficiency in mental courage.

She now thought only of using the important opportunity this confession afforded her, of attempting to reverse Valombrosa's present fate; and as that part of it which related to the Florentine conspiracy was all which it was necessary for any one to know, beyond the few religious who had heard it with her, and as silence with them upon such occasions was part of their Christian duty, she determined to make Baron Wernheim the confidant of this momentous testimony, and urge him to seek redress for his absent cousin.

Magliano, exhausted by pain and violent agitation, had ceased speaking, long ere the confusion of Ippolita's thoughts had assumed any appearance of order.

She now laid one shuddering hand upon his with pathetic earnestness, while she crost herself with the other, and in Valombrosa's name absolved him from every crime against him. — " Unhappy man!" she added, " If your repentance be sincere, those, and every other sin also, will be forgiven you, by the God of Mercy. — I and these holy persons will pray for you!" — and escaping from the penitent's clammy touch, she hurried away, pale and trembling.

Her instant conversation with Baron Wernheim, was productive of the consequence she expected. The Baron was free to go whither he would, for many coming months; and the connection of his sovereign with the ally of Florence put it in his power to enter Tuscany without waiting for formalities.

In few words he expressed his joy at this miraculous interposition of Providence, and his intention of immediately hastening to Florence, and demanding

for his noble relative the restitution of his title and estates.

Wernheim took the parchment containing the momentous testimony, and scarcely waiting for one instruction, or one benediction from the doubtful, fluttering, all-amazed Ippolita, proceeded to the Hospital, for the purpose of putting a few important questions to Magliano.

Having entered the dormitory, he strode with hasty steps towards the bed where the sufferer lay: at the sound of his tread Father Joseph turned round, and motioned him not to advance. "His soul is passing!" said the monk in a thrilling tone, and again turned to the bed.

Wernheim was rivetted where he stood. For a few moments his ear caught only the murmured prayers of the Father as he held up the symbol of redemption before the dying man. But all at once a strange and fearful sound was heard, like the last struggle of life in a powerful

frame: another and another succeeded it; and then all was still.

Father Joseph let the curtain drop from his hand, and turned again towards the Baron: his lips only were seen to move: Wernheim involuntarily prest down his eyes, as if to avoid the sight of the horror he fancied, and quitted the scene.

He returned slowly and thoughtfully the way he came; and meeting Ippolita in the passage through which he was going to say adieu to his aunt, he merely said, "I was too late!"—grasped her suddenly-chilled hand, received the benediction of her expressive eyes, and hastened to commence a journey which had so great an object in prospect.

The confession of Magliano, the death of that unhappy wretch, the sudden hope of Valombrosa's restoration to all he had so cruelly been torn from, the fear of what might be the event of the expected battle in which that beloved object would be engaged, and the departure of Wernheim

itself; all these things passed through Ippolita's mind with a velocity which rendered each image so indistinct, that sometimes she was tempted to fancy herself living under the influence of a spell, and none of these hopes or fears or certainties, other than delusions.

While she pondered on them from morning till night, through many, many successive days, she forgot that she was alone, that her heart, at least, was alone; and Agatha away, whose modest sympathy often beguiled her of confidence, and recompensed her with consolation.

Ippolita indeed no longer felt the want of a friendly companion; discourse was become insupportable to her. Her thoughts were too numerous and too rapid — her anxieties too overpowering for any communication of them. She walked, as in a trance; locked up from every thing, except the contemplation of her own imaginations and retrospections.

The days therefore passing in unconscious and mechanical performance of usual habits, fled without leaving any trace in her memory: so that though she felt the wearisome weight of every moment while it was present, when gone, it left no trace.

The first interruption to this dreamy state of existence, was the news of that battle on which so much depended.

It was brought by Renati, who, pale and haggard, presented himself before her, not many days after the departure of Baron Wernheim. His first words assured her of Valombrosa's safety, and that assurance enabled her fainting soul to bear up against the residue of his account.

The battle had been fought within a short distance of Ravenna. The fortune of the day had changed frequently; and would perhaps have inclined at last to the side of the Venetian and Papal troops, had not the prodigious

weight of the Duke of Ferrara's artillery borne down all opposition.

Each army displayed the desperate courage of men determined upon conquest or death: for ere the day concluded, above ten thousand of the victors, with Gaston de Foix himself, lay dead on the field. Venice and Rome too lost their bravest soldiers; and every one of their most distinguished officers were either killed or taken prisoner.

The fall of the citadel of Ravenna was then inevitable; Colonna therefore surrendered himself and his brave garrison prisoners, but upon honourable conditions. They were permitted to march out with all the honours of war; only bound not to serve against France and the Council of Pisa, for a limited period.

Valombrosa was gone with the details of this battle to His Holiness at Rome; consoled for the impossibility of seeing Ippolita, by the prospect of beholding

Rosalia and Rossano, and witnessing that happiness, the foundations of which had been laid in the tears of his shattered fortune.

Renati gave a dismal and indignant description of the enormities committed by the French troops, at the sacking of Ravenna: an act outrageous in itself, as it was burst into, by the fierce soldiery even while the terms of its surrender were sèttling, and rendered more atrocious by the brutal cruelty with which it was executed. From this dark subject he turned to the just praises of Ippolita's kinsman.

The Cardinal de Medici, he said, had accompanied the Papal army in quality of Legate and Counsellor, and had appeared in the thick of the battle without armour or defence of any kind, going from rank to rank, exhorting the timid, and bestowing blessings upon the brave.

He had fallen at last, Renati added, into the hands of the enemy, solely from

too strict a performance of his duties: for when the contest was over, he had remained upon the field, administering spiritual aid to the dying; and was actually dragged from his knees in the very act of giving absolution to an expiring soldier.

Thus, then, that uncle was a prisoner; and even while Ippolita's heart glowed with pleasure at the description of his christian zeal, her tears flowed over the probable length of his hard captivity.

Renati, however, assured her, that he was said to be treated with the respect due to his sacred character, and that Milan, a city where he had many friends, was the place appointed by the French King for his present confinement.

Giuliano de Medici happily was one of the very few who had retired without loss of life or of liberty from the disastrous field. A troublesome but not dangerous wound detained him in the

camp of Cardona, the Neapolitan General. Her brother Lorenzo, too, had suffered, and that severely. A wound which threatened him with the loss of a limb, was attended by such violent fever, that he lay in the same tent with Giuliano, an object of extreme apprehension to the surgeons.

"The night before my Lord Valombrosa dispatched me on this errand to you, Lady, I sat up with the Prince Lorenzo," said Renati, in reply to Ippolita's anxious questions. "He was delirious indeed,—I wouldn't have done it if he could have known me; but I think his wound not so bad as folks say it is: the fever is more from vexation than pain, I warrant, for I know the Signor of old, and when the vexation has abated, the fever will go down with it. I wish him no harm after all: and perhaps a week or two lying on a sick bed beside one that can talk to

him so well and so kindly as my Lord Giuliano will do, may better him for life."

Renati brushed his hand across his eyes, and hemmed away a little hoarseness in his throat as he spoke. Ippolita fervently joined in the wish he expressed, and her heart springing back to those dearest to her, once more prompted a multitude of fond and fearful questions about Valombrosa.

Renati's sudden eloquence on that subject, charmed for awhile every distressing thought to sleep: he seemed to have noted every instance of Valombrosa's goodness, self-denial, and noble endurance of his altered fortune, which became known to him, and not to have forgotten a single one. While Renati thus praised him for all the virtues which Ippolita knew he possessed, and for all those charms of manner which attract the hearts those virtues must attach,—her heart echoed every word, and the

blessed hope connected with Baron Wernheim's journey, shone through her tears, like sunbeams among clouds.

Ippolita indulged such tempting visions, but not too long, and unwilling to dwell on them till success should have crowned, or disappointment defeated them, she proceeded to discuss with Renati the probable results of the late battle, to Italy and to herself.

Renati was no politician: he had fought as a soldier, and now felt as a patriot; and ignorant of any circumstances but those which took place in the immediate neighbourhood of Ravenna, he could not suggest a single argument for hope of better days. To him the fate of Italy and of the Medici appeared now decided; and with difficulty maintaining his own rough fortitude, he preached patience and endurance to her.

Ippolita's heart seemed to wither within her as he did so: it was long

before she could find voice to speak. At last with pale and quivering lips, but without a single tear, she spoke again of her uncle. — Even to Renati, it seemed as if Ippolita scarcely felt this downfall of her hopes. O little skilled in grief! — it is when we are the most struck, that we appear most calm: there is a frightful stillness of the soul, a sudden conviction that all henceforth in life has become a blank to us, — that complaint is unavailing, — resistance hopeless, — which seats itself too deeply in the heart for any outward sign. Thus, we are refused pity, when we most deserve it.

Comforting himself by her apparent incapacity of comprehending all the consequences of the battle of Ravenna, Renati had less reluctance in saying he must away again by cock-crow the next day; that he had an enterprise in hand, which the Lord Valombrosa had sanctioned with his approval, but which he declined explaining; and as it would

carry him in a very different direction from that of Rome, he did not ask for any reply to the brief message he had brought from Valombrosa.

Trusting in the nobleness of all Valombrosa's plans, but sometimes afraid of their rashness, Ippolita frankly avowed that feeling; and while she gave Renati her warmest wishes for his success in whatever he was about to undertake, cautioned him not to throw away his life in too perilous adventure.

Renati replied, it was the duty of every man to risk much for the public service; and with God's blessing he would do it: and with this sentiment he left her.

Early the next day he departed.

The racking anxiety of the next few weeks, was alternately relieved and heightened by letters from Valombrosa and her uncle Giuliano.

Ippolita learnt from these, that ere the Cardinal had left the neighbourhood of

Ravenna, he had found means to transmit important intelligence to Rome, which determined the Pope to pursue with invigorated hopes, the advantage, which strange to say, the victory of France astonishingly offered to him.

The fall of Gaston de Foix, De Medici said, had palsied the spirits of the soldiery; and the generals who succeeded him were so embroiled in private quarrels with each other, that public service was certain to fall a sacrifice to their dissensions. In addition to this, the insubordination and irregularities consequent on the sacking of Ravenna, and other places of inferior note, had already showed themselves to an alarming degree, so that the Cardinal thought there was no reason to abandon either the hope or the attempt of expelling the enemy from Italy.

Revived by this information, the Pontiff revoked his intention of quitting the capital; invited those to return who had already fled from it in fear of the advance

of the French, and began recruiting his army, and prosecuting his secret negociations with renewed ardour.

Valombrosa confessed himself painfully uncertain of his future movements. —The truce between Germany and Venice was certain of finishing in a peace, which would return him to an unoccupied and unprofitable life: to enter the service as he was pressed to do, of the Pope, would be well and honourable, so long as the enemy of the Pontiff was the enemy of his country:—but the case would be widely different in Valombrosa's opinion, if he were called upon to lift the sword against his paternal city; and therefore until circumstances enabled him to judge whether such an event were likely or not, he denied himself the subduing sight of Ippolita, and remained at Rome to gather information upon this important subject.

Giuliano de Medici recovered of his slight wound, was holding himself in

readiness to attend the diet, which it was said was to be held at Mantua, for the purpose of deliberating on the means of securing peace to Italy.

In these letters, Valombrosa wrote of Rosalia only briefly, though with all his former tenderness; he had too much to say of weightier matters, for the mere effusion of a brother's love.

Of Lorenzo de Medici, he wrote almost kindly; glad to say, that he was slowly recovering and moodily grateful for that oblivion of past injury which the generous Valombrosa silently testified to the brother of her he loved.

He informed her that the Emperor had privately promised not only to preserve the long truce with Venice already consented to, but to command the withdrawing of all his subjects in the pay of France, and to do so at the moment, hereafter most likely to benefit the cause of the church. — This was an additional motive for hope of brighter days.

Valombrosa as yet knew nothing of Baron Wernheim's proceedings in Florence; for Ippolita had settled with the latter, that the information should first come from him. Of that kind friend, she too, as yet heard nothing; but the moment was at hand, in which a crash of joyful and amazing events were to fall on her.

In the same day she heard that the sudden descent of thirty thousand Swiss auxiliaries into the Milanese, and the rapid advance at the same moment of the Papal army towards that point, joined to the Emperor's unexpected order for all his subjects in the pay of France to quit its service, had dissolved the power of Louis XII. as if by the stroke of a magic wand: and that in the confusion of their hasty abandonment of Milan, the French had suffered the Cardinal de Medici to escape out of their hands. Ippolita learnt with transport that his escape had been assisted

by her faithful, fearless Renati, and that both were now safely lodged in Mantua.

With a mixture of horror and gratitude she dwelt on what followed.

The people of Lombardy, so long galled by the yoke of foreign masters, seized the opportunity afforded by the protecting vicinity of the Swiss, and troops of the Church, and rising upon the French garrisons, drove them with fierce massacre from their towns and fortresses.

The army, so late victorious at Ravenna, was driven almost without resistance across the Alps, in less time than an ordinary traveller would have traversed half that country; and Julius, who had so lately been threatened in his very capital, now dictated from that capital the law to Italy.

Every revolted or conquered state was now returned to its lawful Princes; the French were utterly expelled, the Emperor severed from their alliance, and the

King of Arragon as deeply interested as the Supreme Pontiff himself in keeping them beyond the Alps.

Nothing remained now to secure the peace of Italy, but to remove, either by force of arms or of reason, the chief magistrate of Florence.

For this purpose a diet was assembled at Mantua, at which envoys from all the great states appeared, to consult on the justice and necessity of such a measure: and thither Giuliano de Medici, who went there to plead the cause of his family, summoned Ippolita, to give himself and the Cardinal the comfort of seeing her, and of arranging their plans for their future life. Divided between the joy of meeting those beloved relations again, and regret at quitting a place where she had dwelt so long, and received so much kindness — a place too, rendered awful and interesting by the many extraordinary changes which had taken place in her fate since her residence there, Ippo-

lita bade adieu to Santa Barbara and its sisterhood with unfeigned sorrow. — And as she took a last look of the grey building, seen through the transparent mists of early morning, past the shaded burying-ground, and the well of the patron-saint, her heart was oppressed to suffocation. She thought of him who slept in that burying-ground, and of him that she had met by that holy spring, till every other association was forgotten, in the powerful retrospection.

On the road to Trent she met a courier of Baron Wernheim's, speeding into Saltzburgh with dispatches from his master. On seeing her he delivered up his packet; and with a heart which nearly lost its power of beating from excessive agitation, Ippolita broke its seals.

How did she support the joyful shock of its contents!

Valombrosa was again master of fortune and an unclouded name: he was restored to his rank in Florence; and

Wernheim, after having written her the blissful tidings, was to set forth on the happy errand of imparting it to Valombrosa himself, at the abode of Rossano and Rosalia.

Never, Wernheim said, had a circumstance fallen upon luckier times: for not all the justice of their suit, nor all the zeal of friendship, would have been successful two months before. At this juncture, the disasters of France, the clamorous discontents of the people, and the alarmed spirits of Soderini, concurred in giving weight to his wish of propitiating the Emperor; who though withdrawn now from their alliance, might, if flattered by attention to a favourite officer, be induced through his means to lend a favourable ear to their intended efforts of bringing him over to their side.

It was politic, also, to assume an air of liberal confidence, and anxiety to do justice; and Soderini, naturally inclined to what was just and amiable, though some-

times misled by his timidity of character, wisely thought few things more adapted to this end, than the ready admission of Valombrosa's innocence.

The oath of a dying penitent, witnessed by reverend priests, and corroborated by the testimony of a noble Austrian, was evidence sufficient for him, he said to Baron Wernheim during a private interview; he therefore gave immediate and solemn audience to him in public; at which time the Baron simply stated his accidental meeting with Paulo Magliano, produced that wretch's deposition, and called upon the Gonfaloniere and council of Florence to revoke their unjust sentence against his kinsman.

In an eloquent, yet somewhat confused speech, Soderini expressed his satisfaction with the proof offered of Valombrosa's innocence: enlarged on the pleasure it gave him to re-admit amongst them a young man for whom he, in common with all his countrymen, ever

felt the liveliest sentiments of esteem and admiration; then reminded Baron Wernheim, that restored to his rights as a Florentine citizen, the Marquis Valombrosa would be expected to remember its duties, and return into the bosom of his country.

Wernheim had no hesitation in so engaging for his cousin: pleased to know that Valombrosa was honourably released from his military obligations to Venice, by the dispersion of her troops, immediately on the commencement of her long truce with his sovereign. Her envoy was gone to the diet at Mantua, there to assist in the endeavour of placing all things on a sure foundation again; but even if their endeavours failed, there seemed little prospect of her entering into any active measures against a sister state at the instigation of the Supreme Pontiff.

Long ere Ippolita, therefore, had received this letter, she thought Wernheim would have sought his cousin, and

probably have returned with him to Florence, to share in the affecting joy of his welcome back.

Her brain became dizzy at the thought: such a confusion of happy probabilities were before her, that unable to fix steadily upon any one of them, or to scrutinize their rationality, she suffered her thoughts to rove from hope to hope without pause.

Yet ever as her soul rushed forward to the long-desired goal of becoming Valombrosa's wife, one appalling fear started up: the fear that Valombrosa might believe it his duty to separate from her family, if their restoration were effected by force. On the result of the decision at Mantua, therefore, rested all her wishes; and addressing that Great Being, in whose hand are the hearts of kings and subjects, she prayed that no blood might ever be shed again for her suffering race: that unless recalled by the free voices of the nobles and the people, her uncles

might magnanimously refuse to receive their former power.

Ippolita uttered this prayer with pious confidence; conscious that such would have been her petition, had no selfish consideration combined with general humanity to make her utter it; and revived by the pious exercise, she resumed her eventful journey.

As she approached Mantua, this temporary calm gave way; and the fluctuation of her hopes and fears, in immediate expectation of the sentence which was to decide her fate, became agonizing.

In this state she entered the city, and proceeded to the Ducal Palace; where in one of the private apartments she found both her uncles.

The joy of meeting both, after such long and eventful separation, was moderated by the peculiar and awful circumstances under which they met. The Diet was suddenly broken up in disgust

on the Florentine deputy's bold and unexpected attempt to justify the friendship of the Republic for France. The members of the Council being unanimously of opinion that such friendship was pernicious, and treasonable to the other States of Italy, it was pronounced meritorious in the Pontiff to demand at the point of the sword, the dismission of the present Gonfaloniere, and the election of another.

For this purpose the Pope had given orders for his troops to join those of the King of Arragon, under Cardona Vice-roy of Naples, and to advance without delay to the gates of Florence. The Medici were to accompany this army; not, as Giuliano seriously declared, to his pale and speechless niece, with the wish of being forced upon their countrymen, but in the fond hope of being voluntarily restored to their estates, and given a proof of their fellow-citizens' confi-

dence in the nomination of one of their number, to the highest office of the State.

Ippolita heard those tidings with dismay: she could not catch any of her uncle's enthusiasm of hope. She thought if a battle were to take place, and the Florentines be victorious, and her uncles taken prisoners, what horrors might follow. She shuddered to think they might fall immediate victims to that part of the populace still devoted to France and Soderini. If, on the other hand, the Papal arms were victorious, none but Giuliano de Medici was likely to resist the temptation of being reseated in their native land: her family, therefore, would be forced upon their fellow-citizens, and as such, with Valombrosa's principles, it would be his duty to take an active part against them.

But all these things were in the hands of Heaven: and Ippolita knew by

grateful experience, that there are periods in which our finite faculties can see no escapé from most grievous straits, till the Great Dispenser of human affairs divides even the waves of the sea before us, and leads his creatures unhurt to a quiet shore.

In such faith, Ippolita bowed her soul before the present awful ordination: and amidst blessings and scarce-breathed farewells, tearless and self-collected, she saw her uncles depart in the midst of a long retinue of former friends and expectant dependants, for the camp of Cardona.

Ere they parted, Giuliano de Medici assured his niece that no persuasion should induce him to swerve from his resolution of entering Florence otherwise than as a private citizen, unless called to do so, by the legal suffrages of his countrymen; and he taught her to expect, that if disappointed in his hope of being restored to his paternal home,

he would accept the asylum offered him by Henry of England; and so remove himself and her, from those future hopes and fears and disappointments which might still assail them on the same vain subject, in their native land.

Ippolita consequently looked to England as her possible residence hereafter; and the idea of going to pass her life in a foreign country, where she would have but one of all those she loved, to cheer her darkened days, subdued all her fortitude. She dwelt upon the prospect with a horror, which not even her affection and duty to her uncle could in the least abate; and for the period of her residence in the gay court of Mantua, she spent her days and nights in more constant vigils and more importunate prayers, than she had even done in the convent of Santa Barbara.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was on the ninth day of August 1512, that the Papal and Neapolitan armies crossed the Appennines on their momentous errand.

Whatever had been the secret and selfish motives of the Sovereign Pontiff, in his resolution of extirpating the French influence throughout Italy, the resolution itself was worthy of a virtuous patriot, and a sound politician; and assured of Giuliano de Medici's integrity and ability, every Italian State was prepared to hear with joy, that he was placed in the situation which Soderini had so imperfectly filled.

Thus, then, the attacking army ad-

vanced on its way, amid benedictions and friendly auguries: and for once force, bore and deserved the sacred name of justice.

The troops halted on the plain of Prato, close to the town of that name, and within a few miles of Florence. A deputation from the latter city, met them on the plain, and received from the Viceroy Cardona, a distinct explanation of his purpose. In the name of the Pope and the Catholic King, he required of the citizens of Florence the election of a new Gonfaloniere, and the re-admission of the exiled family. Cardona stated that he was authorized by the Medici to promise the re-purchase of their estates from the individuals who had enjoyed them too long as rewards for past services, or bought them at too high a price from the Republic, to be dispossessed of them without great loss and injustice; pledging the Pope's and

his Monarch's security, for the payment of the sums required, by means of loans to the persons in question.

So moderate a demand on the part of the Pontiff, who might now be said to have all Italy at his command; and so generous a proposition from their banished Princes, excited the liveliest sensation in Florence. The majority of the people were at first for granting both demands: but the preponderance of Soderini's party in the council; and the activity of his agents amongst the populace; together with his own eloquent appeal to their feelings, and to his former services, succeeded in producing a hasty resolution to grant one, and reject the other, of these demands.

The Medici were informed they might return to their native place, with the rights of private individuals; but the election of another Gonfaloniere was refused.

No sooner was this message returned,

than the discontents of such as had been cajoled, or surprised into joining in it, broke forth in alarming murmurs; so that Soderini's fears assumed a darker complexion: and dreading the effect of Giuliano de Medici's appearance in Florence, he protracted the negociations, which were necessarily carried on previous to that event; and demurred unwisely about the propriety of granting supplies, and a sum of money to the viceroy of Naples, — conditions on which that general had consented to abstain from further hostility.

Soderini's indecision, or insincerity, and the increasing divisions of the Florentine council, were bitterly complained of by Cardona. Delays, however, were still invented by the Gonfaloniere, who secretly hoped that a spirit of resentment might be raised in the people, by means of which they might eventually be led to revoke their permission for the return of the Medici, and thus deliver himself

from a fruitful source of future apprehension.

In this culpable hope he prolonged discussions, and delayed messages, till the moment past, in which the reply of the Republic had been promised to the enemy.

That moment was the crisis of his own fate. The army encamped near Prato, had originally been ill-supplied with provisions: these had failed, long ere the time appointed for the return of the Florentine envoys; and when that time past, the Neapolitan and Spanish soldiers were no longer to be restrained from rushing upon the town of Prato, and taking bread and revenge at the point of their swords.

The sudden assault of the town was followed by a scene of blood and rapine, and horror, which must for ever disgrace the Spanish name; but historians have described the two brothers of the house of Medici, as rushing between their allies

and their victims, affording protection at the imminent hazard of their own lives, and using tears and supplications where authority and religion failed.

The news of this frightful disaster were brought to Florence, while the Gonfaloniere was yet unwisely balancing between present and future evil. The heroic and forgiving conduct of the Cardinal de Medici, and his brother, was reported with enthusiasm; the people rose at once; and headed by a band of their highest and best nobility, broke into the palace of Magistracy, and declared the Gonfaloniere's authority at an end.

The amazed Soderini attempted a faint resistance; but speedily disarmed, and offered an asylum in the house of one of the other magistrates, he was conducted on the instant by a private passage from the palace, to this place of temporary refuge; and a solemn assembly of all the other public functionaries was

then summoned, to settle the future form of government.

The recall of the Medici to their power, as well as to their patrimony, was unanimously agreed to; and, amidst the acclamations of their fellow-citizens, the principal nobility of the city proceeded to their residence in the camp, to invite them back, and inform Giuliano, that he was elevated to the head of the republic for life.

No sooner had this deputation set forth, than the populace, hitherto kept in awe by the persons who composed it, fell with fury upon the house in which Soderini was waiting the hour of midnight for a safe escort through the city, accusing their former magistrate of treasonable practices, and threatening him with instant death.

At the moment in which a party of these rioters rushed into the apartment where the dispirited Gonfaloniere was seated in melancholy meditation, a

young man with his sword drawn, and his looks inflamed with eagerness and anxiety, broke through the press, and throwing himself before the victim, told them he would defend Soderini's life at the peril of his own.

It was Valombrosa, who had entered Florence at this critical juncture, to take possession of his restored dignities; and who heard in the same breath, of the deposition of Soderini, the recall of the Medici, and the danger which menaced the former.

Nobly regardless of every thing but the claims of gratitude and humanity, he presented but his single sword to the weapons of the mob, exclaiming, "I am amongst you again, my countrymen, through this man's generous acknowledgment of former error, and shall I suffer you to take his life?"

Some of the rioters called out that Soderini was deposed, and declared an enemy of the republic. Valombrosa held

off the person who said this, with yet fiercer resolution. "My friends," he cried, "I question not the lawfulness and wisdom of this deposition; I come not hither to support Soderini as your chief magistrate, but to defend him, as the friend of other days. — By incompetency to rule, he has justly forfeited his right to govern us; but what authority have we to oppress him?"

"Give them way!" interrupted the afflicted Soderini, his courage returning with the conviction that there was yet one generous breast in which he would wish to be respected. "Let them take my life; and so reward the honest, though it seems misjudged services of years."

"They shall take mine first!" was Valombrosa's indignant answer, putting himself in a posture of defence before the venerable man. Tears were seen to trickle down Soderini's cheeks at this: and moved at that sight, as much as by the noble conduct of the man Soderini

had so lately condemned to shame and exile, the people exclaimed he was free to go whither he would; and that if Valombrosa would pledge his word to that effect, Soderini should have leave to depart immediately from the city under his protection.

To this proposition both parties willingly acceded: and attended by the very persons who had menaced him with destruction not an hour before, the once-valued Gonfaloniere quitted Florence for ever.

After an exile of fifteen years, on the last day of August, Giuliano de Medici re-entered his native city. He was attended by all the Tuscan nobility; by the representatives of the Pope and the Catholic King; by the officers of both armies; and by a train of faithful followers.

The procession was rather affecting than splendid; for nearly all the returned exiles were shedding tears: sadly feeling

that there were some losses which no human power could make up.

Valombrosa, by the side of Count Zucharo, was one who received the new ruler on the steps of the council-hall.—After taking a touching leave of Soderini in a city beyond the Florentine jurisdiction, exchanging with him blessings and forgiveness, he returned to Florence, to lend, as he was now required, the weight of his name to that of others upon this momentous occasion; then to hasten to *Il bel Deserto*, whither Giuliano de Medici had permitted Ippolita to be summoned.

The bearer of all this joyful intelligence to Mantua, was one well worthy of it; Prince Angelo Rossano.—His appearance, his countenance, when he presented himself, told the blessed tale before his tongue.

Too much overcome with joy himself for the power of managing the feelings of another, as Rossano took Ippolita's hand,

he could with difficulty pronounce the words, "All you love, are in Florence!"

Ippolita was speechless: she stood awe-struck with the variety and extent of the blessings those few words contained. "What said you," at length she asked, with a bewildered air, "did you indeed tell me that all I love are in Florence? — my uncles, — your Rosalia, — Valombrosa?"

"All, all there!" exclaimed the transported Prince, tears of emotion starting into his eyes. Ippolita dropt at once upon her knees. Words, she had not; — tears, she had not: but her hands pressed upon her almost bursting heart, and the visible rays of her upraised face, spoke the boundless gratitude she felt.

Recovering from this pious ecstacy, with a speaking blush, she rose from the ground, and besought Rossano to confirm his blessed tale.

The Prince then hastened to tell her the events which had restored her family

lawfully to their ancient dignities, replaced Valombrosa in the home of his ancestors, reconciled his love to her and his duty to his country by the fact of their restoration being the free act of the people, and enabled Rossano himself to return with Rosalia, and re-unite the dear circle of family affection in which they had once been bound.

Overwhelmed with so much felicity, Ippolita seemed incredulous of all she heard. She made Rossano repeat again and again, not the particulars of those amazing events, but the assurance that they had really taken place; and she burst repeatedly into transports of joyful tears, as the momentary paroxysms of conviction seized her.

It was long ere she was sufficiently calm to inquire about Baron Wernheim. She heard with mingled pain and pleasure, that he had been summoned from Rome by the death of a veteran friend, who had left him in trust for an only

daughter. A question or two afforded Ippolita the satisfaction of knowing that Agatha Reichenhall was the orphan thus affectingly confided to his care; and her prophetic mind took in at a glance all the effect hereafter, of that interesting relation between them.

Time proved that she was not mistaken.

A rich summer day was closing, when Ippolita and Rossano, after a rapid journey from Mantua, came in sight of *Il bel Deserto.*—Oh, the rush of other times, which that sight occasioned!

Those peaceful groves, those lovely glades, that unsullied edifice, were seen under the full magnificence of an evening sky. The valleys which the travellers left behind in their ascent, were already covered with the shades of darkness, while these mountainous regions yet

glowed with purple and gold, and spoke powerfully to the imagination, as well as to the heart. The darkness below, and the brightness above, seemed emblematical to Ippolita, of her past and present fate; and the transport of gratitude which such a comparison excited, spoke in her starting tears.

The unaltered appearance of every object she contemplated, seemed to annihilate the time which had elapsed since she saw them last: yet what a variety of fortune had happened to herself and the possessors of that mansion, during that period?

When she remembered how she had been torn from this place, what evils she had suffered, what greater ones she had dreaded, and how frantic seemed the hope of ever returning to it, as she did now;—and when she contrasted that remembrance with the present fulness of her cup, she was tempted to fling herself out of the carriage in which she sat,

and upon her knees receive the awful bounty of the All-Good.

Rossano read this sentiment in her varying complexion and swimming eyes, as she gazed with distracted and wandering eagerness upon every well-known face, or tree that she passed by. He disturbed not her meditations by any discourse; but often showed how well he understood them, by occasional friendly pressures of her trembling hand.

On the steps of the portico, among numerous, joyful, and well-remembered faces, Ippolita recognized Renati with many a badge of military honour on his breast and in his cap: bathed in tears, yet glittering in smiles, she gave him her hand to kiss, without venturing to trust her voice: then grasping Prince Angelo's arm, more and more conscious of needing his support, she proceeded with tottering steps up the stair-case, towards the room where she was told her friends were assembled.

In the waiting-rooms she passed Signor Calvesi and Celio, who retreated lest they should detain her; but the sparkling looks of the latter, showed that he had been hurrying to apprize his Lord of her arrival, and in the same moment Valombrosa appeared.

At sight of that beaming face, in that beloved home which was now to be her's also, her limbs failed under her, and without uttering the faintest cry, she sunk at once upon his breast.

Nearly as insensible as herself, Valombrosa bore her mechanically into the midst of her friends.

For a while Ippolita was but just conscious that she passed from his arms, to those of her uncle Giuliano, then to Rosalia's, and thence to Valombrosa's again. She felt the kisses and the tears of those dear friends, but she heard only their sobs and sighs: no one could speak.

At length that voice which was ever

the music of heaven to her, softly murmured, "Ippolita — My own Ippolita — look up, and see who is here to greet you!" —

With a blissful shiver, Ippolita slowly unclosed her eyes, and turning them round, with such a look as we may imagine blessed spirits cast when awaking amid the raptures of another world, she met those of her sweet and gracious uncle. — She was again locked in his arms: and again she burst from them, at the sight of Rosalia, standing like dewy Spring over her fairest blossom, bright and tearful by the side of her husband, who was gone to the cradle of their sleeping child.

Ippolita bent one knee to the ground, and stooping her head, printed a kiss upon the infant's cheek. "My friend!" she then exclaimed, turning to Rosalia with all in her heart in her looks, and action.

"My sister!" cried the tender

Rosalia, returning that ardent embrace with a pure and grateful joy, yet involuntarily whispering, "Oh, that I could see you all!"

Valombrosa overheard the touching, alas! hopeless wish, and precipitating himself towards them, his face covered with graceful tears, he encircled Ippolita and his sister in the same embrace. He looked for an instant round the apartment, as if gratefully acknowledging the happiness of being again master of the home so many circumstances endeared; directed his eyes more eloquently towards Rossano and Giuliano de Medici; then rested them on Heaven.

The fixture of these floated eyes, said audibly to all around, "Never, never, may I forget the awful happiness of this moment!"—Giuliano understood their expression; and advancing with a benignant smile, he took the hand of Ippolita,

and putting it into that of Valombrosa, pressed them fervently together. "Bless you, my children!" he said; "from this moment, you are one."

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